

FIVE CENTS

BRAVE AND BOLD

A DIFFERENT COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK

No. 72

MILE-A-MINUTE TOM,
or The Boy Engineer
of Pine Valley



BY CORNELIUS SHEA

"Get off this train!" commanded Tom leveling his revolver, and with a curse the treacherous engineer leaped from the engine. A volley of rifle shots followed from the rocks near by.

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MILE=A=MINUTE TOM;

OR,

The Young Engineer of Pine Valley.

By CORNELIUS SHEA.

CHAPTER I.

HOW TOM CAME TO BE AN ENGINEER.

"All aboard!" exclaimed the conductor of Train No. 3, of the Bankville and Blue Mountain Railway.

The passengers, who were lingering on the platform, talking with their friends, hastily got upon the cars, and the train slowly pulled out of the depot.

This railroad was a new one, and on the morning our story opens trains had been running but a week.

The road was a hundred miles in length, and ran through the wildest part of New Mexico.

But the company were satisfied that in less than a year the road would pay handsomely, for Bankville was quite a city, and Blue Mountain, the terminus, was the center of the mining district.

There was but a single track, but two switches allowed trains to pass when going in opposite directions.

Train No. 3 pulled out of the Bankville Depot, with Bill Schroeder, a surly-looking man, at the locomotive's throttle.

His fireman was a boy of eighteen, well-built and muscular and handsome as well.

As the road was a new one, all the hands were strangers to the officials, but all had to show a good recommendation before they got a position.

Tom Mansfield—such being the name of the young fireman—had worked two years on the A. T. & K., under his father, who was an engineer.

But one day his father got crushed to death through an accident caused by another engineer, and Tom was left to support his mother.

Soon after this they came to Bankville, and the young fireman, having an excellent recommendation, had no difficulty in securing a job to fire on the new road.

Tom had been in his new place but a week, and, with one exception, he liked the job immensely.

The wild portion of country the road ran through just suited him, for there was considerable danger in running the trains, as outlaws were reported to be numerous in that section, and at any time they might make an attempt to hold up a train.

Being of an adventurous turn of mind, Tom did not object to the danger, but rather liked it, if anything.

The wildness of the country and the kindness of his employers made Tom well satisfied with his position, and the only drawback he had was that he did not like the engineer he was firing for.

And Bill Schroeder did not like Tom, to judge by his actions. Whenever he desired his fireman to do some particular thing he ordered him to do it in a rough tone, not forgetting to put in a plentiful supply of oaths.

On this day the engineer seemed to be more sullen than

usual, which fact the young fireman could not help but notice.

The time-table was arranged so train No. 3 would arrive at Blue Mountain at exactly twelve o'clock, where it would remain until eight in the evening, and then start back for Bankville.

Blue Mountain was reached on time, and when Tom had banked his fire, he left the engine in charge of the wipers, and made his way to a cheap restaurant, where he usually dined.

On his way to this place he noticed Bill Schroeder, the engineer, talking very earnestly to two rough-looking, bearded men.

As he passed he heard one of the men say:

"All right, then; slow up when yer git ter Pine Valley, an' we'll do ther rest!"

Tom gave a start when he heard these words, but paying no further attention to the men, he hurried to the restaurant.

"There is something in the wind," he thought. "I understand that there is a lot of gold dust going to Bankville on our train to-night. Can it be possible that there is a job put up to rob the train? Why should Bill Schroeder slow down at Pine Valley? Well, I shan't say anything, but I'll keep my eyes open, you bet!"

Tom saw nothing more of the engineer until the time came for him to take his place on the locomotive to make the run back to Bankville.

Contrary to his usual manner, Schroeder opened a pleasant conversation with his fireman.

This only served to excite the suspicions of Tom, though he conversed with the engineer readily enough.

Pine Valley was a wild spot about halfway between Bankville and Blue Mountain, situated between two mountains. The valley was plentifully sprinkled with rocks and boulders, and derived its name from a sparse growth of pines, these being about the only species of trees that grew in it.

About two miles north of the valley was a small station, at which the trains stopped on signal only.

Tom Mansfield was not a little nervous when the locomotive neared this station, for he saw a waving lantern, which meant that the train should stop to take on a passenger.

"Some one wants to get on," said the engineer, as he blew the whistle and shut off steam. "I didn't think we would take up anybody here to-night, Tom."

The young fireman made some sort of reply, and then felt to see if his revolver was safe in his pocket.

Finding that it was, he kept on ringing the bell till the train pulled up at the little station.

He watched and saw one man get aboard the train, and then they started again.

"I say, Tom," said Schroeder, suddenly, "let me have your revolver, will you? I left mine at Blue Mountain. I always make it a point to carry one, for this road runs through a dangerous section of country, especially Pine Valley."

"That is why I can't lend you my revolver; I want it myself," returned Tom, quietly.

The engineer muttered an oath at this retort, and then lapsed into silence.

Tom kept a sharp eye on him, and he noticed that, as they neared Pine Valley, he slowed down considerably.

"What are you going to do—stop?" he asked.

"None of your business, you confounded young fool!" replied Schroeder. "Throw some more coal on and keep your mouth shut! I am boss of this engine!"

The young fireman knew there was sufficient coal in the furnace, so he did not make a move to obey the command.

His companion hurled a volley of oaths at him, and again ordered him to replenish the fire with more coal.

"I know my business as well as you know yours, Mr. Schroeder!" exclaimed Tom, with flashing eyes. "There is a full head of steam on, and the fire does not need to be touched for half an hour."

The engineer had shut the steam off entirely now, and the train was fast coming to a stop.

Springing from his seat, he uttered an oath and made a move to clutch Tom by the throat.

But the boy was watching him, and nimbly jumped out of his way, at the same time drawing his revolver.

"Hands off, Bill Schroeder!" he cried. "Don't attempt to touch me, or I'll shoot you dead in your tracks! You are a base scoundrel, and have put up a job to rob the train, but you shall not do it! Get off the engine now, or you are a dead man!"

There was so much earnestness in the boy's voice, that the engineer turned as pale as a sheet.

The muzzle of the revolver was not over two feet from his face, and the look in Tom's eyes told him he meant what he said.

"Why—why, what is the matter?" he gasped. "Have you heard—"

"I know all about it! Get off, I say!" thundered the stalwart young fireman.

Without another word Schroeder sprang from the cab like a whipped cur; and then, as quick as a flash, Tom sprang to the throttle and opened it fully halfway.

With a bound the locomotive darted forward, and then a volley of rifleshots came from a group of rocks close by.

"Foiled!" cried the brave young fireman. "If the fiends have not placed any obstruction on the track, I'll run the train safe into Bankville."

With his hand upon the lever, he watched the track ahead, paying no attention to the shots that were being fired by the band of outlaws, who had planned to rob the train by the aid of the villainous engineer.

Fortunately the track was clear, and, entirely unaided, Tom ran the train into Bankville.

No one had been killed by the bullets from the rifles of the outlaws, though one of the brakemen received a wound that was painful, but not dangerous.

When the road officials learned of what had taken place, Tom Mansfield was at once placed in charge of locomotive No. 5, of train No. 3, on the Bankville and Blue Mountain Railway, a position which destined him to pass through many perilous and startling adventures.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCOURGE OF PINE VALLEY.

When Bill Schroeder jumped from the locomotive he immediately darted behind a rock, evidently thinking that Tom might take it in his head to fire a shot at him.

Though a villain, the man was a rank coward, and he did not get upon his feet until the last car of the train had passed.

But he soon dodged for cover again, as the gang, who were shooting at the engine and train, were not very particular where they sent the bullets.

They were located somewhere on the other side of the track, and waiting until the fast-receding train was well out of sight, the baffled engineer walked upon the track and shouted:

"Hello, Felcher! Hello, Dresden! Is is me—Bill Schroeder!"

An exclamation of surprise, followed by a volley of oaths, partly in English and partly in German, was the response he got, and then a lighted lantern was thrust in his face before he was aware of it.

"Id vos him, cabdain—sure!" exclaimed a voice. "He is vot I calls von grazy fool!"

"Hold on, Dresden, don't get mad," said Schroeder, in a tone that was appealing. "I did the best I could, but the fireman got onto our racket, somehow, and put me off the engine at the point of a pistol when I slowed up for you."

"So that is it?" exclaimed a masked man, stepping forward in the rays of the lantern. "If I had known just how matters stood we would not have fired upon the train at all, then. We thought your heart had failed you at the last moment. Anyhow, we will wait until some other time. If this railroad wants to run through this part of the country, it must pay Masked Dan and his men for the privilege—that's all!"

"Yes, yes!" cried a number of voices in unison. "Long live Masked Dan and his band of free men!"

"Long live anarchy, and death to all corporations!" quickly added the Germans whom Schroeder had called Felcher and Dresden.

The leader of the outlaw band had chuckled at these words. The two men had left Chicago after the slaughter of the policemen by the anarchists, and had joined his band, being a valuable acquisition to it.

He encouraged them in their evil opinions, and had even made them his lieutenants.

It was these two lawless men who had laid the plot to rob the express car, and Schroeder being a man of their own kind, had lent himself to the vile scheme.

But brave Tom Mansfield had prevented it, and now the engineer dared not show himself in Bankville again.

There was only one thing for him to do now, and that was to join Masked Dan's band.

Felcher and Dresden proposed him as a member then and there, and he was elected unanimously.

Then the foiled villains started for their headquarters.

As has before been stated, Pine Valley was plentifully strewn with rocks and boulders.

Under the lead of their masked captain, the crowd of rough-looking men—about thirty in number—began picking their way over a crooked path that led among these.

Ten minutes from the time they left the railroad track they came to a halt.

"Blindfold the newly elected member," exclaimed Masked Dan. "He must be initiated in the regular way."

The cowardly engineer trembled when a hoodwink was placed over his eyes, and the man who was doing it laughed.

"You ain't got as much pluck as your two friends who proposed you," said he. "I doubt whether you will be able to stand the initiation."

At these words Schroeder's teeth began to chatter.

"Keep a stiff upper lip," whispered Dresden, in his ear, speaking in the German tongue. "All will be well—I promise you."

Thus encouraged, the engineer braced up a trifle.

As soon as he had been blindfolded to the full satisfaction of Masked Dan, that worthy gave three distinct raps on a boulder that lay directly before him.

About fifteen seconds of absolute silence followed, and then a voice that sounded hollow and unnatural said:

"Who is it?"

"The Scourge of Pine Valley!" replied the outlaw leader.

"How do I know this?"

"You will not know for sure until you open the secret entrance of his headquarters."

"I will run the risk."

"Do so."

The next instant there was a dull, grinding noise, and the boulder turned over, as if by magic.

The rays of a dark lantern disclosed a hole in the ground where the boulder had been, and in this was a short flight of rough stone steps.

One by one the outlaws filed downward, taking the rascally engineer with them.

When the last man had entered, the grinding noise was repeated, and the boulder rolled back in its place.

Along a passage, about fifty feet in length, the outlaws made their way, and then a heavy wooden door was reached.

Three raps caused this to swing open, and with the words, "'Tis well!" Masked Dan led the way into a large, cavelike chamber.

Two men were already there, evidently those in charge of the retreat, and these promptly saluted their returning comrades.

"We will initiate the engineer at once," said the captain, mounting a platform. "Come to order, men, and prepare the test!"

A stillness that was almost deathlike followed, and then the body of a man was brought out and placed on a long table.

Schroeder was turned so he stood directly over this, and then Masked Dan administered an oath to him that was horrible in the extreme.

The frightened engineer managed to repeat it, and the moment he had sworn to keep it, the hoodwink was whisked from his eyes.

"Bill Schroeder," exclaimed the outlaw captain, in an impressive voice, "before you lies a traitor! He is bound so he cannot move a muscle, and I am now going to stab him to the heart for proving untrue to our band, and as his life blood flows from his body, one of those who proposed you as a member of this organization shall catch it in a cup, and you must drink it, to prove that you mean to keep your oath!"

Schroeder's knees began to knock together, and his teeth chattered like castanets.

But it occurred to him that he must do as he was told, or else die; so he feebly murmured his assent.

Masked Dan drew his knife and stepped to the table, and Felcher immediately stepped forward with a tin cup.

Up went the outlaw captain's powerful arm, and then down came the knife with a sickening thud.

As he coolly drew the knife from the wound a crimson stream followed it.

The German allowed the cup to fill, as the blood trickled downward, and then placed it to the engineer's lips.

Schroeder was so badly scared that he would have fallen to the floor if he had not been supported by a couple of the men.

"Drink!" thundered Masked Dan.

With a shudder Schroeder obeyed.

He drained the cup, and then the men allowed him to sink to the floor.

"Get up, brother!" cried the outlaw captain with a laugh. "The man I stabbed was but a dummy, and you have but drunk a cup of wine!"

CHAPTER III.

STARTLING NEWS AT THE SWITCH.

Tom Mansfield's engine made only one trip in two days, so the day following the treachery of Schroeder the young engineer had a day off.

He would just as leave have gone to work, for he was very proud over his promotion, and was anxious to make his first trip as a full-fledged engine driver.

The superintendent gave him the privilege of selecting his own fireman, so he picked out a young fellow named Lou Dailey, who was working on the road as a brakeman, though he had fired for nearly a year on a Texas road before he came to Bankville.

Tom and Lou were fast friends, so the new arrangement was a very satisfactory one.

The officers of the road thought it probable that Schroeder would turn up with some plea or other, but the day passed and he failed to do so.

"If he was aiding the outlaws to rob the train, he must be one of them," argued Tom, and this version of the matter was accepted by his employers.

"You must keep a sharp lookout, Tom," said Superintendent Maury Kemper. "Schroeder must certainly have it in for you, and it is quite likely he will try to injure you."

"I shall keep my eyes open, sir. Schroeder is not sharp enough to get the best of me, unless he has some one to assist him. I think I will be able to make the trips, if anyone can."

"I like your spirit, Tom," returned the superintendent. "Go ahead and do the best you can. I am afraid we are going to have considerable trouble with the lawless men that infest this region; but if we can manage to run the trains on this road for a year, there will be a mint of money in it for the stockholders. We want only first-class engineers and conductors—men who are brave and determined. Therefore, you will understand that a great deal of the responsibility rests on you. Go in and win."

The young engineer thanked him for his kind words, and then turned his attention to his locomotive.

He saw that every bit of the brass work was rubbed until it shone like a new twenty-dollar gold piece, and arranged the cab to his full satisfaction.

He did not have his license yet, but the officials had promised to have it for him by the time he was ready to start the next day, so this was a matter of little consideration.

Train No. 3 left Bankville on time the next morning, with Engineer Tom at the locomotive's throttle.

The run to Blue Mountain was made in safety, as was the return trip.

And so it kept up for a whole week, the outlaws not bothering them once.

Business continued to boom on the new road, and the company began carrying a large amount of passengers and freight.

The trainmen were on the alert for danger all the time, and every man was well armed.

The company had a contract with an express company to carry a considerable quantity of gold dust from Blue Mountain to Bankville, once a week.

The very first week it was put aboard the express car Bill Schroeder, the engineer, had joined in a scheme to rob the train.

But he was foiled, as is known, by Tom Mansfield.

The second shipment of gold dust was placed aboard a train that left Blue Mountain at four in the morning, which passed Tom's train at a switch between Pine Valley and Bankville.

When the young engineer slowed down at the switch he saw that the other train was not on time.

It should have been there waiting for him, according to the time schedule, but as delays are frequent occurrences on all railroads, he thought nothing of it.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and still there was no sign of the express train.

Tom began to grow uneasy, and called the conductor and asked him what he thought of it.

"Something has happened—that's certain," responded that individual. "I wouldn't be a bit surprised if Masked Dan and his gang have held up the train."

"That is my idea of it," said Tom. "But——"

The boy was interrupted by the shrill blast of a locomotive whistle.

"There she comes!" exclaimed Lou Dailey. "Now we will soon know what caused the delay."

The express came in sight at that moment, and a minute later pulled up at the switch.

"What is the matter?" asked Tom, as the engineer sprang to the ground in an excited manner.

"Matter! Look at the express car!"

Turning his gaze in that direction the young engineer saw that nearly every window in the car was smashed and that it was otherwise mutilated.

"Masked Dan held up the train in Pine Valley and killed two brakemen and the express messenger and then got off with the treasure."

"Yes, an' took one of the young lady passengers with 'em, too," affirmed the fireman.

By this time the express train hands and a number of the passengers were on the spot, talking excitedly of the outrage that had been committed by the outlaws.

Tom leaned from the cab window and listened.

He learned that the young lady the outlaws had taken prisoner was Ethel North, the daughter of Col. North, who was lying wounded in one of the cars from a pistol bullet received during the attack.

Col. North was a retired army officer, and being a native of the territory, chose to make it his home.

With his wife and daughter, he had been on his way to Bankville, where he intended to locate for a while, as he was a heavy stockholder in the railroad.

It must have been the girl's beauty that attracted the attention of the outlaws, or else they expected to get a ransom for her, for she was the only prisoner Masked Dan took.

Tom sympathized deeply with the old man, but he had no time to linger and listen to the story of the outrage.

After learning that the track was clear train No. 3 started on her way, over twenty-five minutes behind time.

"I must make this up," thought the young engineer; and he resolved to do it.

Lou Dailey kept up plenty of steam, and Tom opened wide the throttle.

The train sped along at the terrific rate of a mile a minute. The trainmen nicknamed Tom "Mile a Minute Tom" after that flying trip through Pine Valley.

At the next stopping point they had gained five minutes of the lost time, and then Tom knew he could do it.

As they passed through Pine Valley they saw nothing unusual, though both the young engineer and the men on the train kept a sharp lookout.

The locomotive was a good one, and when the time was up for the train to be at Blue Mountain it was there.

As Tom sprang from the cab after arriving he saw the evil face of Bill Schroeder peering at him from the corner of the depot building.

Schroeder was disguised, and when the conductor took his fare he did not know him.

They went to Blue Mountain on an errand for Masked Dan, and at the same time to get square with Engineer Tom.

The train sped on its way and in due time neared Pine Valley.

When about a mile from the little station the heads of three men appeared above the back of the locomotive tender.

They belonged to Schroeder and his two pals.

Tom sat at his post, gazing upon the track ahead of him, and Lou Dailey was throwing coal in the furnace.

It was the very opportunity the three villains wanted.

Quickly but silently they crept into the coal bunker and made their way toward the unsuspecting young fellows in the cab of the locomotive.

Each carried a revolver in his hand and a short, heavy stick.

At length they had almost reached their victims!

Just then Tom turned and saw his danger.

But too late! Bill Schroeder struck him on the head, and he fell back, completely unconscious.

The fireman was served in a like manner before he had a chance to look around, so the three villains became masters of the situation very easily.

With a grin of satisfaction, Bill Schroeder took his place at the throttle, while the rascally anarchists proceeded to bind Tom and Lou.

The whole thing had happened so quickly that it hardly seemed possible to the villains themselves.

On thundered the train, the trainmen and passengers entirely ignorant of the fact that a different man was in charge of the locomotive.

As they pulled up at the Pine Valley station, Schroeder told Felcher and Dresden to get off on the other side, and take the young engineer and firemen with them.

The moment the train stopped they obeyed.

The villainous engineer was now alone in the cab, and he coolly waited until he received the conductor's signal to start, and then opened the throttle.

He opened it wider than usual, too, but he did it purposely, for as soon as the driving wheels began to revolve he jumped from the locomotive and landed on the ground, on the side of the track opposite the station.

And the train, gaining headway every second, went on through the darkness of the night, with no one on the locomotive!

Schroeder uttered a chuckle of delight as he made his way to the spot where Felcher and Dresden were standing with the two prisoners.

Both Tom and Lou had returned to consciousness, and it was with feelings of horror that they heard Schroeder tell how he had sent the train on with no one at the throttle.

"What are you going to do with us?" demanded Tom, speaking as coolly as possible.

"You vos find out puddy soon," said Dresden.

"You bet he will!" exclaimed Schroeder. "Shall we take them to headquarters?"

"Ve vos leave dem outside till ve report," spoke up Felcher.

This seemed to be satisfactory to his two companions,

CHAPTER IV.

DOOMED TO A HORRIBLE DEATH.

Tom gave a start when he saw Schroeder.

"I wonder what he is doing here?" he thought. "I should think he would be afraid to venture where any of the railroad officials might see him."

The villainous engineer scowled fiercely when he saw Tom looking at him, and then quickly disappeared around the corner of the building.

The young engineer made his way to the dining saloon, resolved that if Schroeder attempted to harm him he would get the worst of it.

But, though he kept a sharp lookout, he saw nothing of him during the afternoon.

When the time came for them to start back to Bankville Tom told his fireman about Schroeder's presence in Blue Mountain, and warned him to be on the lookout for danger.

Both young fellows did look sharp ahead of them, for it occurred to them that possibly Schroeder had taken an afternoon train to Pine Valley and would lay in wait for them there if he really meant to do anything.

But not so! The villain was up to a better scheme than that. He wanted revenge on the brave young fellow who had taken his place on the locomotive, and his friends, Felcher and Dresden, were going to help him get it.

These three members of the outlaw band boarded Tom's train at the Pine Valley platform after the robbery of the other train.

so the ropes about the ankles of Mile-a-Minute Tom and his fireman were cut, and then the two young fellows were assisted to their feet.

But their arms were securely bound behind them, so they were as helpless as infants.

"Come on," said Schroeder. "Walk fast now, or I'll stick a knife in your backs to help you along!"

The distance to the outlaws' secret retreat was not great, and it was reached in less than half an hour.

The ankles of the prisoners were again bound, and then the three villains left them lying on the ground and went inside.

The entrance to the underground place was not near enough for Tom and his companion to see or hear anything by which they might locate it.

As soon as they were left to themselves both boys began struggling to free their hands.

But all their efforts were useless; the anarchists knew how to tie fast knots only too well.

"This is awful!" groaned Tom. "It is a good thing that the track is clear, for the train will go on until it passes the next station before the train hands find out that there is no one on the engine. Schroeder is a fiend!"

"I wonder what he means to do with us?" asked Lou.

"He is bad enough to kill us."

"We must try and get away."

"But we are powerless."

"I know it; we are in a bad box."

It was a long time before Schroeder and his two companions came out of the retreat, and when they did so Masked Dan was with them.

All this time Tom and Lou had been forced to remain in the same position they had been placed in.

"So you are here yet, hey?" laughed Schroeder, in a tantalizing way. "Well, we will soon put an end to your misery. The three-forty-five from Bankville will be along in about ten minutes."

Tom knew not what to make of this speech, but he soon found out what it meant.

At an order from the masked man, who called himself the Scourge of Pine Valley, the boys were picked up bodily by the outlaws, and carried to the railroad track, a few yards distant.

Right across the rails they were laid, and then with a stout rope Felcher and Dresden began tying them fast!

Cold beads of perspiration broke out upon the forehead of Tom, while a cry of horror left the lips of Lou Dailey.

"You surely don't mean to leave us here to be crushed and mangled by the train, do you?" hoarsely cried Tom.

"Keep cool, young fellow; you can't die but once, and it is a fitting death for an engineer to be run over by a locomotive," replied Masked Dan.

"We've got a grudge against you, Tom Mansfield, and you have got to die! The fireman will keep you company for being with you!" exclaimed Bill Schroeder.

At that moment the whistle of an approaching train was heard.

With a mocking laugh the outlaws darted away in the direction of their retreat, leaving Tom and his fireman to their fate.

The next instant the glare of a locomotive's headlight could be seen in the distance!

CHAPTER V.

JOE, THE SHADOW.

Immediately after the officers of the Bankville and Blue Mountain Railroad learned of the attempt to hold up the train, which was so cleverly foiled by the coolness and bravery of Tom Mansfield, they held a meeting and decided to hire a first-class detective to locate the headquarters of the Scourge of Pine Valley and break up the band.

They did this in secret, not allowing any of their most trusted employees to know of it, and on the very day the outlaws made the second attempt to rob the express car, which was a successful one, as the reader knows, the detective arrived at Bankville.

This human sleuthhound, as men of his occupation are sometimes called, was known as the Pinkerton Shadow, though his proper name was Joe Bullock.

He was a young man—not having passed his thirtieth birthday yet—of medium build, and an adept in the calling he chose to pursue.

The extreme audacity of the outlaws in holding up a train and robbing the express car in broad daylight caused the detective to fully realize that he had a dangerous contract on hand.

But he was to receive big pay for his work, and, in case he was successful in breaking up the outlaw band, he was to pocket five hundred dollars extra.

The instant he heard of the robbery of the express car, and the kidnaping of one of the female passengers on the train, the detective made preparations to go to Pine Valley.

He was pretty well tired out from his long journey to Bankville, but he thought the sooner he got to the scene of the robbery the better it would be for him.

Supt. Maury Kempner ordered an engine and one car to be ready in half an hour, and then the shadow disguised himself as an elderly gentleman of means, or, in other words, he desired to pass off as one of the stockholders of the company.

It was quite late in the afternoon when the special started to convey the detective to Pine Valley, and when the engine came to a stop within a mile of the place, and allowed him to get off, it was quite dark.

The engine and car immediately started back for Bankville, and Bullock, the Shadow, was left standing on the side of the roadbed.

He had never been in this section of the country before, but this mattered little to him. He had been told that the outlaws had their headquarters somewhere in Pine Valley, but no one knew exactly where. As he was now at the edge of the valley, he knew as much about the secret retreat of the robbers of Pine Valley as anyone, save the members of the band.

That is the way the detective figured it.

The first thing he did after finding himself alone was to hunt about for a place that would serve as a sort of headquarters for himself.

The country was a wild one, and in such places snug little hiding places are often found.

When he had searched about for half an hour the detective gave a grunt of satisfaction and came to a halt.

He had found a little dry cave, the mouth of which was concealed by overhanging vines.

"Now I'll change my rig," he muttered. "It will hardly do for me to stay around these diggings in my present make-up."

As soon as he had crawled into the cave, lighting his way, of course, with his dark lantern, he took a quick survey of it to make sure that it was not the den of wild beasts.

Having satisfied himself on this point, the Shadow deposited his lantern and the small valise he carried upon the ground.

Then in a very few minutes he removed his outer clothing, which he had worn to deceive the train hands, and donned a rough-looking suit of jean, which he took from the valise.

A wig and false beard were quickly adjusted, and then the Shadow looked like a plain, everyday workingman who had been in hard luck for some time.

"Now I'll go down the track to the place where the outlaws got in their fine work to-day," he muttered, extinguishing the lantern and placing it in one of the capacious pockets his coat contained.

The cave he had selected for his headquarters was not over five minutes' walk from the railroad track, and as the detective knew exactly what direction to take, he soon reached it.

It was not so dark but that he could see objects about him, so he soon selected a boulder and a scraggy pine tree near it, that would act as a landmark to help him find his cave again.

Then he started down the track, walking rather slowly, as though he had long been upon the tramp, and was very tired.

When he had made a trifle over a mile he was satisfied, from the description he had received, that he had reached the spot where the outlaws had stopped and robbed the train.

Coming to a halt, he sat down on the side of the track, as though to rest himself.

"There is one of two things I am satisfied about," he muttered, "and that is, either the headquarters of the outlaws is very close to this place, or at least five miles from it. If it is close by, this man, Masked Dan, evidently thinks no one would believe he would commit his depredations so near it. They say he is very shrewd and daring, and I am inclined to think the latter is correct."

Just then the disguised man heard the faint sound of voices close at hand.

They came from a clump of rocks in front of him, and in an instant he was all attention.

Dropping upon his stomach, he worked his way to the rocks, and creeping into a niche, lay perfectly still.

Two men were talking in low tones, and after listening to their conversation for a minute the detective came to the conclusion that they were outlaws.

"Felcher and Dresden and the new member will be here on the train that is to pass in an hour or so," he heard one of them say. "From what I understand, they have put up a job on the boy that runs the engine of that train. Just what they intend to do I don't know."

"I suppose it ain't any of our business, anyhow," returned the other. "All we want is our share of the plunder we collar. The captain says if things pan out right for the next two months we'll all be rich. He thinks the new railroad will be busted in that time."

"I reckon it will!" laughed the other.

"And I reckon it won't," thought the Shadow. "But something else will be 'busted' inside of that time, and it will be the villainous band you rascals belong to."

The men talked a little while longer and then moved away from the spot.

The detective crept from his place of concealment and followed them.

By their movements he guessed them to be sentinels who were guarding the vicinity of the outlaws' retreat.

And this was exactly what they were.

Masked Dan took every precaution to make his underground den a safe one, and two men were continually stationed about it, both night and day.

But the Shadow did not grow disheartened. He made up his mind to locate the retreat, and, if possible, gain admission to it.

He lingered about, keeping a sharp watch upon the two men, until he heard a train coming.

"That must be the train the three men are coming on," he thought. "I wonder——"

He was interrupted at that instant by seeing the two men start directly for the rock behind which he was concealed.

He pressed flat to the ground and remained perfectly silent.

The next moment the outlaws paused in front of a boulder a few feet distant and pounded three times upon it.

He could not hear what was said, though he strained his ears to do so.

But the stars gave out sufficient light for him to see the boulder roll over.

A man wearing a mask came out from a hole and joined the two outside.

Then all three walked swiftly toward the track.

Acting on a sudden impulse the detective crept to the hole.

The next instant he glided noiselessly down the steps.

He had scarcely got into the passage below when the three men returned.

Down the steps they came, and then the boulder rolled back in its place.

The Shadow was inside the hidden retreat.

CHAPTER VI.

TOM AND THE COLONEL.

Tom gave a groan of agony when he saw the headlight of the approaching locomotive.

It was not over two hundred yards distant, and it seemed that the brave boy and his fireman were doomed to a certain death.

On came the train, and the outlaws, thinking that the two boys were as good as dead, hurried to their secret retreat.

But a kind Providence was not going to permit them to die in that horrible manner.

The outlaws were scarcely out of sight when the form of a man suddenly darted from behind a large rock and sprang with lightning bounds to the railroad.

The roar of the train told him he must do his work quickly or he would not be able to do it at all.

A cry of joy came from the lips of Lou Dailey when he felt a knife sever the ropes that bound him to the steel rails.

Like magic he was whisked from the track, and then the stranger turned his attention to Engineer Tom.

When he started to cut the ropes that secured Tom the locomotive was so close that its headlight lighted up the scene with a brilliant glare.

The engineer had put on the brakes and reversed the engine, but he was too close to do any good when he saw the human obstructions lying across the track.

No! it all depended on the unknown man, who had started in so bravely to rescue the boys.

The pilot of the locomotive was within twenty feet of him now, and still Tom was not loose from the rails.

The young engineer heard his would-be rescuer hoarsely utter the words: "Too late!" and then the glaring headlight disappeared from his vision and he knew no more.

But he was not dead, or even hurt, and when he returned to consciousness five minutes later the forms of a dozen persons bent over him, among whom was his fireman, Lou Dailey.

But the unknown man who had rescued them was nowhere to be seen.

"That was a narrow escape!" exclaimed the engineer of the train. "My heart was in my throat when I saw the two boys lying across the track, for I knew I could not stop the train before I got upon them. The instant I saw them a man rushed to them and cut them loose from the rails. He was just in time, too, for the head wheel of the forward truck cut the heel squarely from the young engineer's shoe, just as he pulled him from the track."

These were the first words Tom heard after opening his eyes.

"He's all right!" exclaimed the conductor, as the boy arose to a sitting posture. "Are you hurt, Tom?"

"No," was the reply; "only badly scared—that's all."

The next moment he got upon his feet, feeling a trifle faint from the terrible ordeal he had passed through.

Lou Dailey was still very pale, and as he grasped the young engineer's hand, he said:

"Tom, that was pretty near death, wasn't it?"

"It was!" exclaimed the boy. "I should like to thank the man who saved us. He is a hero, even if he should prove to be one of the outlaws!"

"The moment he saw you were safe he ran away and disappeared among the rocks," said the engineer.

"I should like to have the opportunity to do him a good turn some day—whoever he was," observed Tom, as he boarded the train, along with the rest.

"So should I," said Lou Dailey.

Everyone took it for granted that it was one of Masked Dan's band who saved the boys, when they had listened to their story.

"The fellow had a more tender heart than Schroeder and his vile companions," observed the conductor. "Well, boys, we must take you on to Blue Mountain with us, you can take the first train back."

There was nothing better to do, so the boys were forced to abide by this.

The train reached Blue Mountain on time, and an hour

later Engineer Tom and Lou Dailey started back for Bankville on another train.

As they passed through Pine Valley they saw nothing of the outlaws.

When they arrived Tom found his engine all right. He learned that the train hands had discovered that there was no one at the throttle twenty minutes after Bill Schroeder had jumped off. The steam ran down, owing to the fact of the fire being low, and the train had stopped on an up grade. There happened to be an engineer on the train, so the run was finished without mishap, though they got in nearly an hour behind time.

The appearance of the young engineer and his fireman was hailed with delight by the officials of the road, and when they learned that Tom had no idea of resigning his position they were doubly glad.

"I shall stick as long as the rest do," said the boy. "I am not afraid of Bill Schroeder or the outlaws he associates with, though I must confess he came near finishing me last night. I will be more careful hereafter."

"We are going to run trains on the road if we have to hire twelve deputy sheriffs to go through on each train," said the superintendent. "Meanwhile we will let things go as they are for the next few days and see how matters turn out."

Tom and his fireman were all ready to make the trip the next day, and the train started on time, one of the passengers being Col. North.

The run to Blue Mountain was made in safety, and as Engineer Tom left his locomotive he was approached by the father of the girl the outlaws had kidnaped, who said:

"Engineer, come and dine with me, will you? I have something to say to you."

The colonel seemed to be much agitated and worried over what had happened to his daughter, and when he spoke to Tom his voice was almost pleading.

"Certainly, sir," replied the boy. "I am at your service, colonel."

The two repaired to the best hotel Blue Mountain afforded, and the colonel ordered dinner to be brought into a private room.

"My boy," said he, "you know about where the band of outlaws are located, as you had experience enough with them the night before last to learn something. You also know that my daughter has been captured by them. Now, then, I want to ask you to lead a party of determined men there and try and rescue her from her captors. I have received a note from one who signs his name 'Masked Dan, the Scourge of Pine Valley,' who promises, on the payment of twenty-five thousand dollars, to release my daughter. I think she can be rescued without paying this enormous sum of money, and that is why I want your services to lead the men to the spot where the outlaws took you and your fireman, after taking you off your locomotive."

"I will do that, sir, if you think it will do any good. But the outlaws are very cunning, and their retreat is well concealed. I doubt if the entrance can be found without the use of dynamite, and that would be dangerous."

"We will make the attempt, anyhow," said the colonel, who was bent on carrying out his idea. "If it fails I suppose I shall have to pay the ransom."

"Very well, sir. When do you want me to lead the men?"

"To-night, after you make your trip. I will have a special engine and car ready to leave Bankville as soon as you get in. The men I have hired will occupy the car, and you and your fireman can take the engine through with a deputy sheriff and myself in the cab with you."

"All right," returned Tom, "I shall be ready as soon as we get back to Bankville."

The young engineer did not have much faith in the colonel's plan. If his advice had been asked he would have unhesitatingly told him to pay the twenty five thousand dollars the outlaw captain demanded; but as it had not been asked, he agreed to serve the colonel as best he could.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT THE DETECTIVE ACCOMPLISHED.

The moment the detective heard the outlaws coming down the stone steps he made up his mind that he was in a tight box.

But he did not lose his presence of mind and get rattled, as the majority of men would have done under like circumstances; he dropped silently to the ground and began crawling along the passage, all the while feeling for a place to hide.

As soon as the boulder rolled back in its place, one of the men struck a match and proceeded to light a lantern.

The match did not make a great deal of light in the passage; but it made just enough for Joe, the Shadow, to see a place where the earth had caved in within a foot of him.

Before the man had finished lighting the lantern he made a sudden twist and rolled into the opening.

His movement caused some more of the earth to give way, and down it came, making no little noise.

"What was that?" he heard one of the outlaws exclaim.

"More dirt caving in, that's all. We must fix that place to-morrow, or, the first thing we know, the passages will be filled with dirt," spoke up a second.

The detective breathed a sigh of relief.

He was safe for the present, anyhow.

It was not likely the men would examine the place as they passed, and even if they did he was pretty well screened from view.

The opening the daring man was lying in was not over ten feet from the floor leading into the secret quarters of the outlaws, and as the men passed him, and the door swung open, he had a pretty good view of the inside.

The minute the door closed a key grated in the lock on the inside, and then, without hesitation, the detective crept from his place of concealment and stood upright in the passage.

"I am inside the outlaws' retreat and yet I am not," he muttered. "I think I shall take the risk of seeing what sort of a passage this is."

Without further ado he took his lantern from his pocket and lighted it.

He quickly examined the passage its whole length, but saw no place that would serve to hide in save the place where the dirt had caved in, which he had already occupied to such good advantage.

After a couple of minutes' survey he held his lantern above his head and looked upward.

As he did so a subdued cry of satisfaction left his lips. He saw an opening, which looked like a small loft, directly over the door.

Placing his toe in a niche in the wall, the detective clambered to it.

The light from his lantern showed him that the top of the outlaws' hiding place was covered with heavy planks which, in many places, did not touch the roof of the natural cavern.

Probably this had been done to prevent the dirt and stones from dropping down upon them. But it made no difference to Dick; it suited him, no matter what the planks had been put there for.

Noiselessly he drew himself upward and crawled through the opening upon the planks.

He had to be very careful lest he might make noise sufficient to cause the men to investigate.

He was a very patient man, was the detective, and it took him fully five minutes to reach a crack in the ceiling, which was but a dozen feet from him when he started.

When he did reach it he turned down his lantern, and lying flat upon his stomach, applied his eye to the crack.

An exultant feeling came over the daring man.

He could see the whole interior of the main apartment of the headquarters of the outlaw band.

He could hear what was being said, too, quite plainly, and from the lips of a couple of men almost directly beneath him he learned that Ethel North, the girl prisoner, was confined in a chamber that opened somewhere in the main part of the cave.

Straining his ears he heard the following:

"If ther gal's dad don't come down with the boodle, ther captain says he'll hunt up a parson an' make her be his wife."

"I don't approve of that, 'cause he is a putty hard boss, an' if he gits a wife we'll have two ter order us around, instead of one."

"I don't think he'd keep her here long if he did marry her."

"Why?"

"'Cause he might git jealous of some of his men."

"I reckon he wouldn't git jealous of you."

"No, nor you, either. You'll never be hung for your beauty."

Then both outlaws laughed at their jokes, and changed the subject.

This bit of conversation caused the Shadow to become more deeply interested than ever.

He resolved to find the chamber the girl was confined in, and if possible communicate with her.

This man deemed nothing impossible until he had tried it and made an utter failure of it.

Utilizing the utmost caution, he began crawling over the planks.

He got as near the outer edges as he could in doing this, and every crack that was wide enough he looked through.

For half an hour he kept this up, but every time he got an opportunity to look downward he was peering into the lighted apartment below.

At length he was at the end of the loft farthest from

the door, and he made up his mind that he must be pretty near what he sought.

Presently he came to a crack through which no light came.

"Eureka!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "There is a darkened room below! Now, the question is whether it is the girl's prison or the captain's room? The men all sleep in bunks about the main apartment, for I saw them lying upon them. This might be the captain's private apartment, and then it might be the place the girl is confined in. How am I going to find out?"

The detective scratched his head in a thoughtful manner for a moment, and then promptly came to a decision.

He would drop something through the crack, and if any of the outlaw band were there they would think it was a piece of dirt that had fallen through of its own accord, and take no notice of it. But if Col. North's daughter was there she would most likely become frightened at the noise.

This was the only plan the Shadow could form under the circumstances, so he set about it at once.

Selecting a good-sized pebble from the plenty that were scattered about upon the planks, he deliberately dropped it through the crack!

The next instant there came a stifled scream from below, and the detective knew he had struck the right place.

But he was forced to remain perfectly quiet for a time, because the noise the girl made might call some one there to see what it meant.

But fortunately this did not occur, though the prisoner had now lighted a lamp and was walking up and down the room in an agonized manner.

The Shadow dared not trust himself to speak to her, so, drawing a memorandum book from his pocket, he quickly wrote the following on one of its pages:

"Keep up your courage; a friend is very near, who will save you before many hours. Destroy this immediately.
"A FRIEND."

Tearing the leaf from the book, he wrapped it about a pebble and dropped it through the crack almost at the girl's feet.

The detective could not see her, owing to the fact that the crack ran in a slanting manner, but in less than a minute afterward he heard her exclaim:

"Thank God!"

While he was studying over what to do next he heard the sounds of a commotion below.

As he could do nothing toward rescuing the girl just then, the Shadow made his way back to a spot where he could hear what was going on below.

He was just in time to hear the outlaws resolve, to a man, that Engineer Tom and his fireman should be tied to the track and run over by the early morning train.

The time had passed rapidly since the detective arrived in Pine Valley, and it was now well on toward morning.

He had accomplished considerable during the few short hours he had been there, but he resolved to do one thing more before daylight.

He meant to save the young engineer and fireman the outlaws proposed to murder in such a fiendish manner!

He heard the outlaw captain say that in half an hour

they would go out and tie the two boys to the railroad track.

He also learned that they were lying outside, bound hand and foot.

But he could not get out until some of them went out ahead of him, because he did not know how to roll the boulder aside.

Forgetting all about the imprisoned girl for the time, he made his way back to the opening over the door of the retreat and dropped lightly into the passage.

Then he crawled in the hole where he had first concealed himself, and waited for some of the outlaws to come out.

It seemed a long time, but presently the key grated in the lock and four men came out, one of them carrying a lighted lantern.

From his place of concealment the detective watched one of them seize a heavy wooden lever and press down upon it.

Then they all filed up the steps and disappeared.

With drawn revolver, the Shadow started noiselessly after them.

He was just about to ascend the steps when the boulder rolled back in its place.

But this did not deter him; waiting a couple of minutes, he caught hold of the lever as the outlaw had done, and caused it to open again.

But he could not have opened it wide enough, for he barely succeeded in getting outside without being crushed as it fell back again.

But a miss is as good as a mile, as the old saying is, and the detective thought nothing of the occurrence.

Straight for the railroad track he went, though he was forced to proceed very slowly, for fear of being seen by the men.

He got near enough to see the villains tie the two boys to the rails, and as they left them to their fate he heard the whistle of the approaching train.

"Great God!" he exclaimed, "will I be in time?"

But he was in time, for he was the stranger who so bravely saved the lives of Mile-a-Minute Tom and Lou Dailey.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TERRIBLE SITUATION.

The colonel conversed with Tom all the way back to the switch yard, and the young engineer was forced to caution him not to talk so loudly of his plans.

"Pshaw!" was the reply. "I don't believe there are any of the outlaws or their friends about here."

"You can't tell," said Tom. "Masked Dan's men are a well-organized band, and they certainly have spies out, both here and in Bankville. It stands them in hand to do so, as they are thus enabled to know all that is going on."

Neither of them noticed the knowing look that flitted over the face of one of the yard men, who had been listening to a good part of their conversation.

The moment he got the opportunity this man, who was nothing more nor less than one of Masked Dan's spies, made his way behind some freight cars and gave a low whistle.

The next minute Felcher, the anarchist, appeared, though he was disguised as a cattle man.

The yard man quickly told him what he had heard, and the German gave a guttural laugh of pleasure.

"I vos got blenty news for der captain," said he. "The young engineer and der fireman dey vos alive, alrede, and now dey vos goin' to run a special, loaded mit shooting men to preak up der band and get away der girl! But I guess me not! Der whole pusiness vill die—I bet me on dot!"

With these words he left the spy and made his way from the yard.

All unconscious of this, Engineer Tom boarded his engine to make the return trip when the time came.

The colonel was aboard this train, and so was Felcher, the outlaw.

When Pine Valley station was reached the latter got off.

Half an hour later the entire outlaw band knew that a party of men were coming in a special car to make an effort to exterminate them that night.

Tom's train got into Bankville all right, and then the colonel hastened to see if his orders had been carried out.

He found that they had; the engine and car were ready to pull out of the depot at a moment's notice, and twenty-four armed men were in the car.

Tom sent a message to his mother, stating that he was going a little way down the road on a special, and then jumped aboard the waiting locomotive.

Lou Dailey followed him, and then Col. North and a deputy sheriff clambered into the cab.

Then the start was made.

"Go to the spot where they had you tied to the track, and then stop," said the colonel. "I am satisfied we have enough men with us to exterminate the outlaw band, and rescue my daughter quite easily."

"We must find them first," returned Tom, quietly.

On bounded the engine and car at the rate of sixty miles an hour.

Being a heavy stockholder in the company, the colonel had been able to procure the best locomotive on the road, and the manner in which the young engineer handled it was a credit to him.

Whizz-whirr! Whizz-whirr! Onward they sped, the men in the car declaring they had never rode so fast before.

And Engineer Tom just gloried in it. With his hand upon the lever and his eyes upon the glistening steel rails ahead, he was in the seventh heaven.

"You just tell us about where the villains came out when they carried you to the track, and we will do the rest," spoke up the colonel, after a lengthy pause. "We have picks and shovels in plenty, and if it is necessary we will dig our way into the outlaws' headquarters."

"We must look out for an ambush," observed the deputy sheriff. "They are desperate fellows, and are not likely to give up the game very easily."

But Col. North was satisfied that his plan would work, and it was useless to argue with him, though it must be confessed none of the men he had hired were ready to risk running into an ambush on his account.

They were determined men for all that, and were prepared to battle with the outlaws in an open fight, and bravely face death.

The nearer they got to Pine Valley the more nervous and excited the colonel became.

"We will teach the scoundrels a lesson!" he cried. "After all, it fell to my lot to devise a scheme to rid the world of the Scourge of Pine Valley."

Tom, Lou and the deputy sheriff exchanged glances. It occurred to them that the man was fast becoming insane on the subject of slaying the outlaws and rescuing his daughter.

On thundered the locomotive and car, and presently the valley was entered.

A mile farther and they would be at the place where they were to stop.

As yet Tom had not shut off the steam a particle.

Half a mile farther and he reached out his hand to do so.

But at that instant his face turned as pale as death and a cry of horror escaped his lips.

They had just rounded a sharp curve, and less than two hundred feet ahead of them the track was torn up.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHADOW IN HARD LUCK.

For reasons of his own the detective did not tarry, after rescuing Mile a Minute Tom and his fireman.

As soon as he got out of sight of those on the train he made direct for the cave in which he had left his valise.

He was pretty well tired out, and wanted sleep.

Reaching the cave, he crept through the tangled vines inside, and, with his coat for a pillow, he lay down and promptly dropped into a deep slumber.

It was nearly noon when he awoke, and when he did he felt much refreshed, but rather hungry.

"Now I guess I'll walk the track as far as Pine Valley Station, and see if I can get something to eat," muttered the Shadow.

Still disguised as a poor man in hard luck, he made his way to the railroad track, and followed it till he came to the little station.

There was not a building in sight, but observing a wagon road leading from it, the detective started along this.

When he had walked about a mile he came in sight of a ranch. A roughly-painted sign informed him that "refreshments were to be had" there, so he made his way to the door of the log house and tapped upon it.

A stout, middle-aged woman promptly opened it, and demanded to know what he wanted.

"Can I get something to eat?" asked the Shadow.

"I reckon ye kin—that is, if ye have got ther money to pay for it," was the quick reply.

"I've got a little money left—very little, too; I've got three dollars and fifty cents, and I want to lay it all out in grub."

"I kin 'commodeate ye, stranger. Come inside. I s'pose you want yer dinner, an' then ye want ter take ther balance of yer money's worth along with ye?"

"That's it, exactly!" exclaimed the detective. "What have you got that's good to eat?"

"How'll a slice of ham, three eggs, some corn dodgers an' a cup of coffee strike ye for a dinner?"

"Good!"

"I'll git it ready for you in a jiffy, then."

The hungry man sat down to wait for the meal, and when it was at length placed before him he did full justice to it.

The woman was liberal, for when he had eaten his fill, she gave him a cooked ham and a bag of biscuits for the money he told her he had.

After paying her, the detective started back for his cave, with enough provisions to last him three days.

For reasons of his own he remained in the vicinity of the cave all day.

But shortly after darkness he ventured forth and made his way slowly in the direction of the outlaws' retreat.

"I'll rescue the girl and then devise a plan to trap the whole gang," he thought.

He reached the spot where the movable boulder was located without meeting or seeing a human being.

He knew that three raps upon the stone would cause the secret entrance to open for him, but it would be naught but extreme foolhardiness to enter the place in this manner. No, he must conceal himself close by and wait for some of the outlaws to come out and leave the place open for a short time.

Settling himself down in the same niche he had occupied the night before, he prepared to wait.

An hour passed and the situation remained the same.

Not a sound was heard that would indicate there was a living being about.

But the detective did not appear to mind this; he kept very still and waited.

At length his patience was rewarded by two men coming out of the underground place.

But they closed the opening the instant they came out, and the Shadow was balked.

It must have been within an hour of midnight when they came back, and as they halted very close to the hiding man he could hear what they said quite plainly.

"There comes that young engineer's train," one of them observed, as the shriek of a locomotive whistle rang out.

"Yes," returned the other; "an' I reckon that she'll be ther last train ter run in a day or two."

"Sart'inly. Jist give ther signal an' git ther gang out with ther crowbars an' shovels. We've got ter make quick work of this."

Determined upon learning the exact way to gain admission to the outlaws' cave, the detective left his place of concealment and crept to a point dangerously near the two men.

Three sharp blows were struck upon the boulder, and then the following conversation took place:

"Who is it?"

"The Scourge of Pine Valley."

"How do I know this?"

"You will not know for sure until you open the secret entrance of his headquarters."

"I will run the risk."

"Do so."

A feeling of satisfaction came upon the Shadow. So keen was his sense of hearing that he heard every word, and he had the questions and answers firmly placed in his mind almost instantly.

"There is only one thing that puzzles me," he thought. "Where is the man who answers the summons? He is not

located in the passage at the foot of the steps. He must be in the main apartment, and there is no doubt a pipe running to the surface of the ground, so sound can easily be transmitted. I must find this out."

He had no time to ponder further on the subject. Already the boulder had turned over, and the two outlaws were descending the stone steps.

As they intended to come right out, they allowed the hole to remain open.

As the detective peered into the hole, he saw that a lighted lantern was there, and this told him that he had a small chance to gain an entrance without being discovered.

He was just conjuring up some plan of action, when a startling thing took place.

The Shadow received a sharp blow on the back of his head and pitched headlong down the steps.

Then the form of a man quickly sprang down after him, and a voice exclaimed:

"Py chimminy! Dis vos a spy, I guess. Lucky I vos dere!"

It was Felcher, the anarchist, who spoke.

"Vot vos up?" interrogated Dresden, who quickly followed his chum down the steps, not forgetting to close the opening after him.

"Ve vos catch a prize," was the reply. "Hey, dere! give me a little help!"

The two men who had entered the passage first quickly came to the German's assistance, and in less than a minute later the detective was bound securely.

The blow had temporarily stunned him, but still he made a desperate struggle, though it was useless.

"Dake him inside!" cried Felcher. "He must be von spy!"

Meanwhile the Shadow was fast recovering the full use of his faculties.

"What is the matter, my friends?" he cried, in a frightened tone of voice. "I was walking by when I saw a light in this hole. Out of curiosity I looked in, when some one hit me. I meant no harm, I assure you. I am only a poor man in hard luck, and I am on my way to Kansas City, where I live."

"The chances are you'll never git there," returned one of the men. "We'll take you ter ther captain an' see what he thinks of you."

The detective began to plead with his captors in a frightened manner, all the while assuming the character he represented.

But the lawless men only laughed at him, and the next moment he was hustled into the main chamber of the headquarters of the Scourge of Pine Valley.

"Ha! What have we here?" exclaimed Masked Dan, as his eyes rested upon the prisoner.

The Shadow at once started to tell a story that suited the occasion, but he was cut short before he had spoken a dozen words.

"Lock him in the strong room until we get through with the job outside," said the outlaw chief. "When we have completed that task we will attend to his case."

The detective saw it was useless to say anything more, so, acting as though he was thoroughly frightened, he allowed the men to place him in the dark room without making the least resistance.

CHAPTER X.

A DIABOLICAL SCHEME.

The thoughts that flew through the mind of Mile-a-Minute Tom, when he saw that the locomotive and car were rushing to certain destruction, can better be imagined than described.

Almost in an instant he had reversed the engine and whistled for "down brakes," but he knew it was too late.

But, strange to say, neither he nor his companions thought of jumping, and even if they had done so, the chances of escape would have been a hundred to one against them.

The locomotive was going so fast that in ten seconds from the time the young engineer saw their danger it was off the rails!

Luckily the ground was comparatively level and hard at this point, and its enormous weight kept the engine from turning over; but the moment the car left the track it was overturned with a loud crash and splintered into fragments.

Bump—bump—bump! The locomotive surged over the ground for a dozen yards and then ran plump into a small pit of sand and came to a stop.

The fireman and the colonel were flung clean through the window of the cab by the force of the shock, but Tom and the deputy sheriff managed to keep inside, though they were rendered unconscious by the concussion.

Lou Dailey escaped being injured, as he had landed in a soft spot, and with great presence of mind he clambered into the cab again and shut off the steam.

Then he lifted Tom to a sitting posture and wildly called him by his name and asked him if he was hurt.

In about half a minute the young engineer came to.

"Where am I?" he exclaimed. "Oh! the track—it was torn up, I remember!"

"Yes," replied his fireman. "Are you hurt?"

"No; only bruised a little, I guess."

"Get up and see if you can walk."

Tom did so, and found that he could.

"Let us go and see how the poor fellows in the car have fared," said Lou, when he saw that his companions were really all right.

With wildly-beating hearts the four started to the spot where the fragments of the car lay.

As they neared it they saw the forms of several men working among the débris.

They were the men who had escaped being killed in the smash-up.

There were but seven of them; the rest of the twenty-four had either been killed or wounded.

"This is awful!" groaned Col. North.

"They must have got wind about our coming, and this is how they have served us," said the deputy.

Engineer Tom was horrified at what had taken place, but he knew that a train from Bankville would be along inside of two hours, and it was necessary that it should be signaled and stopped before it got there.

The deputy sheriff agreed to go back and wait for the train, while the rest took care of the wounded the best they knew how.

It was necessary that they should have water, so Tom went at once to the locomotive to get some.

But he found that the tank had sprung a leak, and that there was not a drop of water to be obtained there.

It was then that the boy thought of a stream he had noticed in passing through the valley.

It was located within two hundred yards of the wreck, so he quickly hastened to it.

He got a pail of water and started to return, when suddenly three men sprang upon him and bore him to the ground.

They were Bill Schroeder and the two anarchists, and they rendered the young engineer powerless in no time.

"If you can't be killed on the railroad we'll find some other way that will settle you!" hissed Schroeder, as he lifted Tom to his feet, with his revolver pressed against his temple.

"You vos bet dot ve vill!" exclaimed Felcher, while Dresden chuckled gleefully.

Straight to the underground retreat Tom was carried, while his companions waited anxiously for him to return with the water to relieve the sufferings of the victims of the outlaws' fiendish plot.

The young engineer's heart sank within him as he felt himself carried underground, for he knew that nothing short of a miracle would save him from being slain now.

The moment he was carried into the main chamber, where the entire band was congregated, his revolver was taken and he was released.

He arose to his feet at a command from the captain, but made no effort to escape, knowing full well that it was useless.

"So this is the fellow who has twice escaped death?" observed Masked Dan, as he turned his gaze upon Tom. "Well, young man, I promise you that you will not escape this time. You have walked in the light of day for the last time!"

"Why do you wish to take my life?" asked the boy. "Are you not satisfied with the terrible slaughter you have already caused to-night?"

Masked Dan laughed.

"I shall not be satisfied until all my enemies are out of the way," said he. "I have got a spy locked up, and I will have him brought out presently to see if you know him. Whether you do or not, it will make no difference, as you will both die before morning!"

"Take a walk around, and see what snug quarters we have," remarked Schroeder, grinning at the pallor that overspread Tom's face.

The young engineer made no reply, but sat down on a bench in a dejected manner.

"Go and bring out the other fellow," commanded Masked Dan. "I am going to kill them in a strictly original manner."

A couple of the men retired, and in less than three minutes returned, leading Joe, the Shadow.

The detective was quite pale, but beyond this he appeared unconcerned.

"I am going to let you two fellows kill each other—or, rather, it will look as though you do," said Masked Dan, smiling beneath his mask. "Get two chairs, somebody."

The chairs were immediately brought, and Tom and the detective were forced to sit upon them, facing each other, at a distance of four feet.

Then, at a command from the outlaw captain, they

were bound to the chairs, with their feet resting upon the bottom rungs and their right arms perfectly free!

"Now, then, fetch two rifles that have hair triggers," said Masked Dan.

Not one of the men knew what he was going to do, but the rifles were soon brought to him.

"Are they loaded?"

"They are," was the reply.

"All right. I will show you what I am going to do with them."

Taking one of the rifles, he placed the butt to Tom's shoulder and the muzzle against the detective's heart.

The other one he reversed by placing the butt against the detective's shoulder and the muzzle to the young engineer's heart.

Then, while the two men held the weapons in position, he bound them securely together in the center, and then proceeded to tie the captives' right arms, which had been left free, to the rifles, arranging it so that their fingers protruded through the trigger guards and rested upon the triggers.

A chuckle left the lips of Masked Dan when all this had been accomplished.

"Men," he exclaimed, "if you don't want to run the risk of getting shot, don't stand in range of these fellows' backs. I am going to cock the rifles now!"

The next instant he did so, and then took a seat at one side where he could watch their faces.

Though a brave man, the perspiration broke out upon the detective's forehead in great beads as he realized the position he was placed in.

He knew if he so much as moved his finger he would send a bullet crashing into the boy's heart.

And Engineer Tom's heart almost stood still as he realized the same thing.

Of all the diabolical schemes either of them had ever heard of, this was the worst.

"Gentlemen," said Masked Dan, when a minute had passed, "remember the one who has the strongest nerve lives the longest! But he who moves his finger first will not suffer long after he discharges the rifle, for the instant he fires off goes the other gun. Take it easy now and let us see how long you can live!"

CHAPTER XI.

A GIRL WITH PLUCK.

But little has been said of the girl prisoner in the outlaws' den, and now it becomes necessary to devote some space to her.

Ethel North, unlike most girls of her age, was quite plucky.

When captured by Masked Dan, though very much frightened, she did not give up all hopes of seeing her relatives and friends again, but resolved to wait a reasonable length of time for some one to effect her release.

During her stay in the retreat she had been treated fairly well, though she was kept a close prisoner.

The note she received in such a peculiar manner from the detective encouraged her greatly, and she had great hopes of getting out of the clutches of the outlaws with-

out her father paying the vast sum of money Masked Dan demanded for her release.

On the morning following the delivery of the note Ethel began to look about her prison with more interest than usual.

As the note had been dropped from the ceiling, it occurred to her that whoever came for her might take her out that way.

She determined to see what sort of a place it was up there, so she stood on a chair and tried to reach the crack in the planks overhead.

But she was not quite high enough, so reluctantly she got down and tried to think of some other plan.

Suddenly she thought of an empty barrel that stood in a corner of her prison. That would be just about high enough!

It did not take the girl very long to get the barrel in the proper position, and then, by aid of the chair, she mounted it.

Her head now nearly touched the rough plank ceiling.

But when she strove to look through the crack she could see nothing, for it was as dark as a pocket up there.

Placing her fingers in the crack, she tried to dislodge one of the planks.

To her joy it moved.

Ethel North was becoming interested now. What if she should make her escape unaided?

She gave a push upward and a piece of plank about eight feet long turned over, disclosing an opening large enough to admit her body.

"I'm going up there," muttered the girl. "Somebody has been there who claims to be a friend, and whoever it was must have got there from the outside. I am going up there, but how?"

Had a boy been in her place he would have easily drawn himself upward, but Ethel was only a girl, and though a brave one, she knew little of the art of climbing.

"If I was only up a little higher I could do it," she thought.

Then she happened to look at the chair that stood near the barrel.

The next moment she reached down and secured it.

It was a small, wooden chair, and would just about stand upon the head of the barrel.

But Ethel made up her mind that she had to run risks if she hoped to escape, so she resolved to trust her weight to the chair.

As gently as possible she got upon it, all the while holding fast with her hands to the planks above.

At length she stood upright upon the chair, with her head and shoulders through the hole in the ceiling.

The rest was easy. A minute later the girl was in the loft.

It was very dark up there, and as she had no light, or means of getting any, she had to move with the utmost caution.

When she had moved along about a dozen feet a light suddenly flashed in her very eyes.

Breathless with fright she came to a pause.

She was on the very edge of a rough trapdoor, and had it not been that one of the outlaws entered the room below with a light just then, she would have tumbled headlong downward an instant later!

The sigh of relief that escaped the lips of the girl was loud enough for the man to hear, but he did not seem to notice it.

It was a very small room he was in—not much larger than a closet—and as Ethel gazed at him from the edge of the opening, she saw him set a lighted lantern on the ground, and then proceed to place a number of rifles that he had brought with him upon a rack.

One glance at the little apartment would have been enough to convince anybody that it was the place where the outlaws kept their weapons and ammunition.

On both sides was a rack about nine feet long, and each was filled with rifles.

"Well," muttered the outlaw, loud enough for the girl to hear, "this is the last lot. I am glad they are all cleaned and oiled, and loaded with cartridges, for I do hate a greasy job. Ther captain says as how we might have to use the rifles to-night, and if we do, I'll bet they will be in good order!"

Having placed the last one in the rack, the man left the room, leaving his lantern behind.

The moment he closed the door Ethel began to look about for a means to descend into the little apartment.

The trap was right near one end of the room, and as she peered over the edge, she saw a number of cleats nailed to an upright beam, which showed that the outlaws had at first intended to use the loft for some purpose, and had provided a way to get up and down.

Ethel was getting braver all the time, for down she came into the room without any hesitation.

"So they expect to use these rifles to-night, do they?" she soliloquized. "Well, I shall use them first."

Having been brought up in the West, Ethel knew all about a rifle, and, one at a time, she took the weapons from the rack and emptied the cartridges from the magazines.

It took her fully ten minutes to do this, and when she had finished her task she made her way into the loft again, taking one of the rifles and all of the cartridges with her.

"I don't think those rifles will kill anybody to-night, unless they are reloaded," she muttered, with a smile of satisfaction.

Upon consideration, she concluded to go back to her prison and wait until night, after the majority of the band had left the retreat, before she made the attempt to escape.

She reached the room in safety, the chair and barrel serving her without tumbling down.

She was careful to put the plank back in its place before descending to the floor, and then placing the rifle and cartridges where they would not be discovered by the Indian squaw who brought her meals, she righted the appearance of the room, and then sat down to pass the time as best she could.

When the squaw came to bring her supper that night she informed the girl prisoner that the captain had ordered her to spend the evening with the pretty paleface, so that she might not be lonely.

Ethel was forced to put up with this, and so long did the squaw stay that the girl became tired and sleepy, and at length threw herself upon her cot and fell asleep.

This was a strong hint for the squaw to retire, which she did, but Ethel slept on for four or five hours after that

When she awoke and found herself alone, her first thought was to make the attempt to escape.

She had no means of knowing what time it was, but she thought it could not be daylight yet.

Getting out the rifle, which was loaded, and ready to be discharged sixteen times, if necessary, she placed the barrel and chair into position, and a few minutes later was in the loft.

Cautiously she made her way to the trap, for there was no light below now, and she could not see two inches ahead of her.

When she came to it she made a move to go down below, but at that instant the door of the room opened, and one of the outlaws came in with a lantern and selected two rifles from one of the racks.

"These are the hair-trigger fellers," she heard him say; "I guess they'll send ther young engineer and that fool of a spy ter ther devil quick enough! I wonder what kind of a scheme ther captain is a-goin' to work on 'em, anyhow?"

Half a minute after the man went out with the rifles Ethel was in the room.

Holding her rifle ready for instant use, she made her way through the darkness in the direction of the door.

CHAPTER XII.

ETHEL NORTH ACCOMPLISHES SOMETHING.

Mile a-Minute Tom made up his mind that his time had come, but he resolved that he would not knowingly press the trigger that would send a bullet crashing through the heart of the man who sat facing him.

With Masked Dan's words ringing in his ears he closed his eyes, expecting death to come every second.

A deathly stillness reigned throughout the cave as the outlaws waited to see the result of their captain's diabolical scheme.

The seconds flitted by—slowly, it seemed—and at length a whole minute passed.

The bound forms of the outlaws' victims sat as immovable as statues, but it was plain that the strain upon them was something terrible.

Another minute came and went, and then, unable to stand it any longer, the young engineer fainted!

The instant he did so the hammer of the rifle descended, but there was no report—merely a click.

This so disconcerted the detective that unconsciously he pressed the trigger of the weapon his arm was bound to.

Click! That was all. Neither of the rifles were discharged!

As Masked Dan realized this a howl of rage escaped his lips.

"What means this?" he shouted. "Where is the man who cleaned and loaded the rifles to-day?"

"Here I am, captain," said one of the men, stepping forward in a trembling manner. "I attended to them all correctly, sir; it must be that some of the cartridges are bad."

"That cannot be, you hound! You have neglected your duty."

"I have not, captain," persisted the outlaw. "I made

sure that I loaded every one of them after I had finished cleaning and oiling."

"Well," said the outlaw chief, with an icy smile, "as my plan to kill the two prisoners has failed, you step up and do the job."

"Hold!" exclaimed a ringing voice. "If the prisoners are not released instantly the man my rifle is leveled at will die!"

With cries of surprise and astonishment every man in the place turned his gaze in the direction the voice came from.

Standing in a doorway a few yards distant they beheld Ethel North, the girl captive! She had a rifle to her shoulder, and its muzzle was pointed directly at the heart of Masked Dan!

"I mean what I say," went on the brave girl. "I can shoot true to the mark, and my rifle is loaded!"

Bold as he was, the outlaw chief quailed before the girl. He felt that she was capable of doing just what she threatened, and he realized that he was as near death at that moment as he had ever been in his life.

"Untie those men!"

As the command came from the girl's lips, Masked Dan somehow felt bound to obey her.

"Do as she says," he said, addressing his men, but not moving his position a single inch. "By heavens, men! she means business, and I don't want to drop off just yet."

"It is all right," whispered one of the outlaws; "if we do untie 'em to satisfy her, they can't get out."

One of the villains sprang to obey the command of Ethel, and a minute later both Tom and the detective were free.

The young engineer had now recovered from his fainting spell, and he allowed the detective to assist him from his chair.

"Follow me," whispered the Shadow.

Walking a few paces toward the entrance of the retreat, he halted and said:

"Are you through with us?"

"For the present—yes," returned Masked Dan, still keeping his eyes upon the muzzle of the rifle that covered his heart.

"Can we go, then?"

"You are welcome to go as far as you can get," spoke up Bill Schroeder.

"Yes, dot is all right," chuckled Felcher.

"Yaw!" grinned Dresden.

The detective conducted Tom straight to the door of the retreat, and unlocking it, passed out into the passage.

As the door closed behind them the outlaws did not show the least concern. They thought that, being unacquainted with the secret means of exit, that would be as far as they would get.

"Now, miss, you might lower that rifle," spoke up Masked Dan.

"You deserve to be shot through the heart," was the calm rejoinder. "Is your promise good for anything?"

"If I make a promise to you I will keep it," replied the outlaw captain, who, if possible, was growing more uneasy every moment.

"Promise me that you will not harm either of the two who have just been released from the chairs, or myself, for the next twenty-four hours, and I will lay down my rifle."

"I promise you that."

"Villain as you are, I will take your word."

The next moment Ethel North placed the rifle on the ground, and then, the excitement getting the best of her, sank down beside it in a swoon.

A sigh of relief went up from every man present, and Masked Dan muttered:

"I admire the pluck of that girl. I've a great notion to make her my wife!"

Having returned to his normal condition, the outlaw captain made his way to the rear of the cave and called the squaw.

The woman was dozing when he called, and, springing to her feet in alarm, she rushed out.

The first thing Masked Dan did was to deliver her a blow with his fist, after which he demanded to know how the prisoner had escaped from her apartment.

As the squaw did not know, she, of course, could not inform him; and then, to make matters worse for her, she could not produce the key to Ethel's prison when he asked for it.

She had mislaid it somehow, which was quite a lucky thing for the girl, since the entire blame would now be laid upon the squaw.

"Find the key at once!" exclaimed the masked villain. "Take the girl back to her room, and if you let her get out again I'll brain you and feed your carcass to the coyotes!"

After a search of five minutes the old hag found the key where she had dropped it while dozing.

She then dashed some water in the unconscious girl's face and soon brought her to.

"Off with her, now!" exclaimed the outlaw captain, "and remember what I told you."

Tremblingly the squaw conducted Ethel to her prison, and unlocking the door, ushered her in.

There was no light in the place, so she did not observe the barrel and chair in the center of the apartment and the dislodged plank in the ceiling.

The squaw locked the door, thinking it must have been her fault that her charge got out, but how, her thick head could not imagine.

Once inside, Ethel quickly adjusted the ceiling plank to its proper place, and then moved the barrel and chair to where they belonged.

"I am satisfied with what I have done so far," she thought. "I have fooled them nicely; and if that villainous man only keeps his word, I shall get out of here before twenty-four hours pass, as will the two that were about to be killed. If I had not removed the cartridges from the rifles in the armory, it would have been all up with them. They are the worst fiends I ever heard of, these outlaws, and it stands me in hand to keep cool. What I did a short time ago I never had an idea I could do. I will be brave if I die for it!"

Meanwhile, Masked Dan, as soon as he saw that the fair captive was again placed under lock and key, made his way back into the main cave.

Though he had promised the girl that he would not harm Engineer Tom or the detective, he meant to break his word and slay them at once.

"Half a dozen of you go out into the passage and bring the boy and the spy in," said he, addressing the men.

The required number at once started to do his bidding.

But a minute later they came back, and Schroeder, who was one of their number, exclaimed:

"Captain, they are not in the passage, and the entrance is open!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MAKING REPAIRS.

The detective was no sooner in the passage than an exultant cry left his lips.

"If they but wait two minutes before they come out after us, they will find us missing," said he, in a whisper to the young engineer.

"Why?" asked Tom.

"I know how to get out. Hurry, and I will show you."

The next minute the shadow seized the lever and threw back the boulder as gently as possible.

Up the steps they noiselessly hurried, and a few seconds later emerged into the open air.

It was fast getting daylight, and it behooved them to get away from the spot as quickly as possible.

At the suggestion of Tom they started on a run for the scene of the wreck, the boy explaining about it as they did so.

In a very short time they reached it, and found several men there, nursing the wounded and guarding the bodies of those who had been killed.

Tom had scarcely been there half a minute when he missed his companion.

He looked around for him, but could find him nowhere.

The detective had watched his opportunity to depart unnoticed, and was on his way to the cave he called his headquarters.

Engineer Tom was much surprised at his disappearance, but he made no comment on it to the men gathered about the wrecked car.

A large crowd had collected there during his absence. They came from two trains, one of which was lying on the track but a hundred yards the other side of the spot where the track had been torn up, and the other was waiting at the Pine Valley Station.

As Tom arrived upon the scene of the wreck the men were preparing to carry the dead and wounded to the waiting train.

A couple of litters had been made, and these answered the purpose.

"Where is the outlaw band located?" asked a big miner. "Don't anybody know?"

"I know," quickly replied Engineer Tom; "I have just come from there!"

As he spoke the words, Col. North rushed up to him and seized him by the hands.

"Where have you been so long?" he asked.

The next moment Tom was the central figure of an interested group, relating his late experience.

Cries of surprise went up from all sides when he had briefly related his remarkable story, and Lou Dailey was so glad to see him safe and sound that he fairly hugged him with delight.

There was nothing left to do for the present but to convey the dead and wounded back to Bankville, and this the train did, Tom going with it to make a report concerning the condition of his locomotive.

As soon as the train backed into Bankville, and the railroad officials became acquainted with the true state of affairs, a construction train with a hundred men, and the necessary materials, was sent back to put the track in order, and see what could be done with the derailed locomotive.

At their own request, Mile-a-Minute Tom and Lou Dailey were the engineer and fireman that took the construction train to the scene of the smash-up.

Col. North had written a letter, addressed to Masked Dan, the contents of which was an acceptance of the proposal the outlaw chief made.

He was now perfectly willing to pay the twenty-five thousand dollars for the release of his daughter.

This letter was to be left on the top of a huge flat rock near the scene of the smash-up in Pine Valley, and the colonel sent a man on the construction train to deliver it at that place.

Mile-a-Minute Tom knew of this, and when they got to the place where the track had to be repaired, he resolved to keep a sharp watch upon that rock to see if anyone came for the letter.

He saw the man place the letter there, and then, keeping a sharp lookout from the window of the cab, he waited to see the result.

With the large force of men working the track was soon repaired, and then they proceeded to lay a temporary switch to the locomotive that was lodged in the sand pit in order that it might be pulled out and towed to the repair shop at Bankville.

Along toward noon Tom saw one of the workmen leave his job and make in a roundabout way for the rock.

Leaving the engine in charge of Lou Dailey, the young engineer jumped to the ground and followed him in a cautious manner.

He saw him take the letter and place it carefully in his pocket and then come back to his work.

"I must watch that man," muttered Tom. "He is in league with the outlaws to a certainty!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DETECTIVE'S TRICK.

Joe, the Shadow, no sooner reached his hiding place than he threw himself down to take a sleep.

He did not worry over what had occurred, or what might occur in the next few hours, but sought the rest he needed.

For six hours he slept, and then, after washing at a little brook, he ate a meal of cold ham and corn cakes.

After this rather frugal repast the detective lit his pipe and sat down to figure out what was to be done next.

"I must get the girl away from the outlaws first," he muttered. "The chances are that Masked Dan will not accept the sum of money he demanded for her ransom, after the silly move her father made last night. But I ought to have an assistant to do the job, and— By Jove! I'll take the young engineer into my confidence—that's what I'll do! He is a brave and determined fellow, if he is rather young. I'll hunt him up as soon as possible; but the first thing I must do is to change my disguise."

Having delivered himself of these thoughts, the Shadow took off his garments one by one, and coolly turned them inside out.

Then he donned them again, and, lo! he represented a cattleman, as far as his apparel went.

A broad-brimmed hat was fished out of his valise, together with a brown wig and a false beard to match, and then he was ready for business.

After adjusting these to his full satisfaction, he took a heavy revolver and a bowie knife from the valise and stuck them in his belt.

"Now, I'll go down the track to the place where the outlaws wrecked the special," he exclaimed, and, leaving the cave, he sauntered leisurely in that direction.

As he neared the spot he heard the noise made by the construction hands driving spikes, and he readily guessed what was going on.

The detective did not go directly among the men, but leaving the track, wended his way through a grove of pines until he had passed them.

Then, seating himself upon a bowlder, where he could see without being seen, he concluded to wait until noon before he sought out Engineer Tom.

As the hour of twelve drew near he saw one of the men who had been working near the derailed locomotive slyly leave his work and start almost directly toward him.

"I wonder what that fellow is up to? He acts a trifle suspicious," muttered the Shadow.

Keeping his eyes upon the man, who was no other than the fellow Tom saw take the letter from the rock, the detective slid from his perch out of sight.

The flat rock where the letter had been deposited at the order of Col. North was not over a dozen yards away from the Shadow, though he was not aware of the fact that it amounted to anything more than any other rock in the vicinity.

But when he saw the man take the letter and give a chuckle of satisfaction, the detective became all attention.

The workman placed the letter in his pocket and passed so close to the rock the hiding man lay behind that it was a miracle he was not discovered.

As he started for the scene of his work again the Shadow heard him mutter:

"It's a lucky thing I saw that letter placed there. It's for Masked Dan, and when I deliver it into his hands, along with the recommendation I've got, I guess there'll be no trouble about me becoming a member of the band."

"Whew!" exclaimed the Shadow, under his breath. "I must have both the letter and the recommendation. If I make the right move now, I am a dead winner within the next twenty-four hours!"

As soon as twelve o'clock came, the disguised man made his way to the locomotive of the construction train, and seeing Engineer Tom there, asked to see him in private.

Tom, of course, did not recognize him, but the detective soon proved who he was, and then, after ten minutes' conversation, the two thoroughly understood each other.

The Shadow then left the engine in order to keep a good watch upon the man.

He was just in time to see the fellow get paid off and start in the direction of Pine Valley Station.

After him started the Shadow, but keeping at a safe distance behind him, until a very lonely spot was reached.

Then he increased his pace and overtook the would be member of the outlaw band.

"Hello, stranger!" said he; "where are you going?"

"I don't know exactly," replied the man, coming to a halt. "Where are you going?"

"I don't know, either. Say!"

"What do you want?"

"Just hold your hands behind you, will you?"

As the detective spoke he drew his revolver and placed the muzzle within two feet of the fellow's nose.

"Wh a-at—what!" stammered the astonished individual.

"Never mind now. Do as I say, and be quick about it."

Being a sensible man, the Shadow's advice was promptly taken, and the next moment a pair of handcuffs snapped upon the wrists of the luckless rascal.

With surprising quickness the detective "went through" his prisoner and brought two envelopes to light.

One was sealed and bore the name of Masked Dan, and the other had no inscription whatever, but contained a folded sheet of paper.

"I guess this must be the recommendation," said the Shadow. "But I'll open it and see before I let you go."

"Who are you, anyway?" asked the handcuffed man, with a puzzled look.

"You will find out if I ever set eyes on you after I dismiss you. If you think your life is worth anything, you had better get out of this part of the country as quick as you can."

"Why, do you know anything about me?"

"I know enough to tell you that you are not the kind of a man Masked Dan wants."

A look of extreme uneasiness came over the man's countenance.

"Who are you, anyway?" he again asked.

"If you ever meet Masked Dan ask him—he will tell you."

"Good Lord! you ain't he, are you?"

"Never mind. I'll tell you he don't want such as you to join his band. I'm going to take off the handcuffs, and when I say 'go,' I want you to do it; and don't you look behind, either, for if you do you will get a lead pill. Now, then, go!"

The Shadow had removed the handcuffs, and the instant he spoke the word the fellow darted off like a shot.

He watched him until his form was lost to view, and then, with a satisfied smile, opened the envelope that contained no address.

The sheet of paper he took from it contained the following brief note:

"TO MASKED DAN: Whereas, the bearer of this note is no longer safe in Arizona, I herewith recommend him to you as a first-class man. Your old college chum,

"PAUL BARTLETT."

That was all there was of it, but it was enough to cause the detective to make a sudden resolve.

He would go to Masked Dan and apply for membership in his band on the strength of the recommendation!

CHAPTER XV.

ETHEL NORTH ESCAPES.

The Pinkerton shadow hung around the Pine Valley Station all day long, and when night came he made for the outlaws' retreat.

Though he knew how to do it well enough, he dared not work his way inside; equipped with the recommendation and Col. North's letter, he was posing as a greenhorn, and a would-be member of the band.

"I must wait in the vicinity of the entrance until I see some one who belongs there," he muttered, as he neared the pivotal rock.

He leaned against a tree a few yards distant and prepared to stay.

When he had been there half an hour, he heard low voices near him, and he knew that some of the outlaws were stirring.

Without any hesitation the detective hurried to the spot where the voices came from.

The next minute he came upon two men.

"What are you hanging around here for, stranger?" asked one of them.

"Lookin' for a job," calmly replied the detective.

"I guess you'd better get out of these diggings, then; men who live in Pine Valley don't work for a living."

"Them's jist ther kind of fellers I'm lookin' for," asserted the Shadow, adopting a familiar tone of voice.

"You are a peculiar sort of a fellow, I guess," said one of the men.

"I should smile," grunted the other. "How much money have you got with you?"

"Not a red cent."

"I guess we had better examine you and make sure of it. We never allow anybody to run around these diggings with any money in their clothes."

"Hold on!" exclaimed the detective; "I guess you fellers are ther ones I'm lookin' for. I want to see Masked Dan, the Scourge of Pine Valley."

"What do you want to see him for?"

"That's my business."

"You needn't get so deucedly sassy about it, stranger."

"Never mind, now; can I see Masked Dan?"

"Here he is; take a look at him!"

A masked man stepped from behind a bowlder as the words were spoken. He held a revolver in his hand, which was pointed directly at the detective's breast.

"You see me; now, what do you want?" he demanded, after a pause.

"I would like to speak in private with you," answered the detective, not showing the least sign of fear.

"Seize him, men, and take him below!" cried Masked Dan, for it was really he. "I will soon learn who and what he is."

The Shadow did not make a struggle when the men sprang upon him and bound his hands behind his back.

"Come on," commanded the outlaw captain, as he led the way to the entrance of the retreat.

Three minutes later the daring man was in the underground den, where he had passed through such an ordeal the night before.

"Untie his hands," said Masked Dan. "There is no danger of his going out, I guess."

The moment his hands were free the disguised man drew the two envelopes from his pocket and handed them to the outlaw captain.

"What is this?" exclaimed Masked Dan, as he glanced at the letter from Col. North. "How came you by this, anyhow?"

"I saw a man place it on a flat rock near ther railroad track, an' when he went away I got it. I was glad when I saw it was addressed to you, for I wanted to see you, an' I thought by delivering it to you it might help introduce me."

"You did, eh?" And the villain then read the colonel's letter, smiling wickedly as he did so.

"That's all right," he said, placing the missive in his pocket. "Now, what is this?"

He then proceeded to read the recommendation, and as he finished a whistle of surprise escaped his lips.

"Well, how is it?" questioned the detective. "Is it to be, or not to be?"

"It is to be," returned Masked Dan. "You come highly recommended, and you shall become a member at once. What is your name?"

"Dick Jaggs."

"Are you prepared to go through our regular initiation?"

"I am."

"Very well. If you prove yourself a worthy and brave man, I will take you to Blue Mountain with me to-morrow night. I have a little private business there."

"Thank you!"

"You must not thank me now; you have not stood the test yet, you know."

"I am able to stand it if any man ever did," replied the detective, and he congratulated himself on the excellent progress he was making.

"From what I already know of you, I like you first rate," went on Masked Dan. "But after you are put to the test I may not have such a good opinion of you."

A few minutes later the disguised man was led to the center of the cave, and then he was put through in the same manner as Schroeder had been.

There was a marked difference in the way he went through, though, for, unlike the villainous engineer, he did not once flinch or even hesitate.

He was roundly applauded for his wonderful display of nerve, and then Masked Dan shook him warmly by the hand and said he should go with him the following night.

"Whew!" whistled the Shadow, when it was all over, and when he had seated himself on a bench in a corner of the retreat, "that initiation beats anything I ever heard of! Well, I was forced to take an oath, which, for the sake of humanity, I must break at my first opportunity. I am going to get that girl out of here to-night, if such a thing is possible."

But it was not possible, as he found out, for everybody seemed to want to talk to him, and as the hours wore on he was forced to leave the attempt to rescue Ethel North until a more favorable opportunity arrived.

Early the next morning he was instructed in the manner of opening and closing the entrance, and, though he already knew all about it, he appeared to be much interested.

"We have to lie low while it is daylight," said one of the outlaws. "It's nights that we do our business. We

have men who go to Bankville and Blue Mountain, who collar all the coin they can in any way that is the most handy. All they get they bring to the captain, and he divides what there is on hand the first of every month. We are going to let the railroad alone for a few weeks, and then, when a good chance comes, hold up a train and clean it out."

"That's the idea!" exclaimed the detective. "I am very glad I joined this band."

"You ought to be, for it's an honor to be under Masked Dan, who is the best captain that ever drew breath."

All day long the Shadow was forced to remain in the cave, but when night came he got permission to go out with a couple of men before it was time to start with the captain on the proposed trip to Blue Mountain.

Just as they were going out he told the men that he had to go back in the cave after something, and advised them to close the entrance, so he might try his hand at getting out alone.

"Sure," said one of them. "It's easy enough, but you ought to make sure that you can do it."

The moment the boulder rolled back in its place he darted through the passage, but instead of entering the door of the retreat, he clambered into the loft.

"I'll get the girl out now or die for it!" he muttered.

Noiselessly he crawled along upon the planks until he was halfway to the apartment the girl was confined in.

Then he suddenly heard a noise quite near him.

It was in the loft, too, and it struck the daring man that somebody besides himself was there.

But who could it be?

Acting on a sudden resolve, he struck a match.

Then he heard a stifled cry of alarm, and beheld—

The very person he was looking for not ten feet from him!

"Don't get frightened, miss; I have come to rescue you," he whispered, as soon as he recovered from his astonishment.

"Who are you?" asked Ethel.

"I am the friend who dropped you the note the other night."

"Oh!" and a sigh of relief came from the girl's lips.

Ethel had been in the loft three or four times since she had saved the lives of Mile-a-Minute Tom and the detective, but being unacquainted with the way to get out of the passage, she made nothing by her short pilgrimages.

It so happened that she came up there this time just at the minute the detective wanted her.

After passing a few words, so they thoroughly understood each other, the daring man led the way to the passage, and after making sure that the way was clear, dropped gently down, and assisted Ethel to follow him.

Ten minutes from the time he had parted with the two outlaws he was back there with the fair captive at his side.

Now came the most dangerous part of the proceeding.

But there was no time to study over it, so seizing the lever, he threw the boulder over as gently as he could.

Then he boldly walked up the steps, bidding the girl to follow at a distance of six feet.

The two men who went out before him were nowhere to be seen, and seizing Ethel North by the hand, he assisted her to the open air.

The girl was free at last!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FEAR OF A COLLISION.

Tom was greatly surprised when he learned that Col. North's daughter had escaped from the outlaws, and was now safe in her father's house.

The Shadow told him how he had rescued her, when they were in a place where it was safe to talk, but did not inform him that he had become a member of the outlaw band in order to gain the end he was seeking.

He could have told Tom lots of things that would have astonished him, but he did not deem it proper to do so just then.

"Well, Tom," said Superintendent Maury Kemper the next morning, "do you think you will be able to make the round trip to-day?"

"Yes, sir," replied the young engineer; "I shall not allow myself to be tricked again."

"We have concluded to put an extra man on each engine—one who can handle a shooting iron in any shape, and who is not afraid to handle it. Here is the man who will go with you."

As the superintendent ceased speaking he turned to a bright, active-looking young man of perhaps twenty-five.

"This is Mr. Mansfield, the engineer, 'Mr. Simrall,'" said he.

Mile-a-Minute Tom immediately extended his hand, and the young man shook it in a hearty manner.

"I guess we'll like each other first rate!" he exclaimed. "But don't call me Mr. Simrall—call me Harrison—that's my name."

"And you may call me Tom," spoke up our young friend. "This is my fireman, Lou Dailey."

"I like you, too," said Simrall, bluntly.

"Simrall was a typical Westerner in appearance, though born in old Kentucky. He was attired in a neatly fitting suit of buckskin, wore his hair long, and kept the top of his head covered with a broad-brimmed white felt hat. He was armed with a rifle, revolvers and a hunting knife, and, born and reared in the mountains of Kentucky as he had been, he knew how to use them.

Tom felt like himself when he got hold of the throttle of his engine again, and the way he made up time that morning was remarkable.

The run to Blue Mountain was made without accident or incident, and when the young engineer left the locomotive, Harrison Simrall accompanied him.

"If those fellows try any funny games on you, they'll have me to deal with, too," remarked Simrall. "It would be a sort of pleasure to me if I was to plug a couple of those outlaws. I've got no use for such coyotes as they are."

"You must be an excellent shot," said Tom.

"Pretty good; but there are plenty of men that can beat me."

On the return trip that night the young engineer kept a sharp watch ahead as they neared Pine Valley.

Shortly after they left the little station he suddenly saw a red lantern swinging back and forth across the track ahead of the locomotive.

That was the signal for danger, so he promptly put on the brake.

"Look out for a trick now!" exclaimed Simrall, as he unslung his rifle and loosened the revolvers in his belt.

Tom was on the alert for danger as the train slowed down. Like Simrall, he believed a trick to rob the train was being played.

As the locomotive neared the swinging red lantern, a rifle shot rang out from the side of the track, and a bullet clipped a lock of hair from the young engineer's head.

"It's you they are after!" exclaimed the cowboy. "Well, I'll plug that feller with the red lantern."

He had scarcely finished speaking when his rifle cracked and the light disappeared.

"Keep your head low and start her up!" cried Simrall. "That feller won't stop any more trains, I reckon."

Tom obeyed, and as the locomotive forged ahead again another shot rang out.

Simrall answered it by firing in the direction the flash came from, but with what result they could not tell.

By this time the train was under good headway again, and the danger was soon passed.

"They mean to take my life, it seems," said Mile-a-Minute Tom, "but as they have failed so many times, I'll stick it out a while longer. Masked Dan and his gang will be routed out sooner or later, and I want to do all I can to help do the job."

"You just keep your eyes open every time you go out, and be more than careful when you go through Pine Valley, and you'll be all right," returned the cowboy.

"I should think the railroad company would make a move to wipe the gang out, anyhow," spoke up Lou Dailey. "This watching the track and guarding the locomotives might be all right, but if the outlaws were exterminated, it would not have to be done."

"I'll exterminate them fast enough if they only give me the chance," and Simrall patted the stock of his rifle as he spoke.

The rest of the run to Bankville was made without further mishap, and when Tom left his engine, Simrall insisted on walking home with him.

"I am hired to be your bodyguard," said he, "and I am going to do my duty."

"All right," laughed Tom; "how are you going to guard me while I am asleep?"

"Oh, that's all fixed. The superintendent has engaged board for me at your mother's house."

"Do you mean that?"

"Sure."

"Well, my mother must be quite anxious about me, too."

"She ought to be."

The young engineer said no more on the subject, and, bidding Lou Dailey good-night, went on home with his bodyguard at his side.

The Kentuckian slept in a room adjoining Tom's, and when the boy got up rather late the next morning he found him sitting in the hallway near his door, calmly smoking his pipe.

"Hello, Tom," said he; "did you sleep well?"

"First rate," replied the boy; "and how did you make out?"

"Very well, thank you. I've been up about an hour, though."

The two descended to the lower part of the house, where Mrs. Mansfield welcomed them with a warm breakfast.

As it was the young engineer's day off, he concluded to stay home and take it easy.

Harrison Simrall was a very entertaining companion, and the two passed the time very pleasantly.

About the middle of the afternoon the carriage of Col. North drove up to the door, and the colonel and his daughter, Ethel, alighted.

"I thought I would bring Ethel around and introduce her to you," said the colonel, as he shook hands with Tom; "she seems to be quite interested in you."

The young engineer blushed as he was introduced to the girl, for she was very pretty, and bestowed upon him a most charming smile.

"When we met last, Mr. Mansfield, it was under very trying circumstances," said Ethel.

"Yes, indeed; but, thanks to your remarkable courage and presence of mind, I got out of the outlaws' den."

And the girl told her adventures in full, winding up by stating how the detective had escorted her to Pine Valley Station just in time to catch a train for Bankville, and then left her without even telling who he was, or where he resided.

Tom reckoned that afternoon was one of the most pleasant ones he had ever spent, and as the colonel and his daughter took their departure they both gave him a pressing invitation to call at no distant day.

For the next week things ran along very smoothly.

Tom made his regular trips, and neither he nor any of the other engineers were bothered.

The Scourge of Pine Valley kept very close, but Tom knew it could not last long.

In the past few days half a dozen shanties had sprung up near Pine Valley Station, the cause of which was that some one had located a vein of silver near there.

When this leaked out it made business very good for the railroad company, for people began flocking there by the score.

A week from the time the last of the half-dozen shanties had been built nearly fifty more were constructed and occupied.

Pine Valley was no longer a signal station, but the main way-station of the road.

And during all this time the outlaws had remained quiet!

One night Tom and Harrison Simrall were aroused from their slumbers by a violent knocking at the door of the house.

They donned their clothing in a jiffy and rushed downstairs to see what it meant.

When they opened the door they found Col. North standing there in a great state of excitement.

"The outlaws have stolen Ethel away again!" he cried, wildly. "They have gone in the direction of the depot; I chased them as far as here, and, happening to think of you, I made up my mind to ask your assistance."

"And you will get it!" exclaimed Tom; "come on, Harrison."

Revolvers in hand, the two rushed for the depot, the colonel following as fast as he could.

It was but a short distance to the depot, and just as they reached it they heard the puffing of a locomotive that was leaving.

"They have stolen an engine!" gasped the young en-

gineer; "but there is another one steamed up. We will follow and overtake them!"

This was true. Half a dozen outlaws, under the lead of Masked Dan, had been daring enough to force their way into the colonel's house and kidnap his daughter; and now they had seized a locomotive in order to get back to their retreat with the prisoner.

As Tom and Simrall rushed for the roundhouse a couple of shots came from the rapidly-receding locomotive, and they distinctly heard the bullets whistle as they passed dangerously close to them.

But they paid no attention to this; they must get a locomotive out at once to start in pursuit!

Tom knew not what had become of the watchmen and wipers, but, seeing that his own engine was ready to go out, he gave Simrall instructions to attend the switch, and jumped into the cab.

Two minutes later the locomotive was upon the main track, just as Col. North came puffing to the scene.

"Can you overtake them, Tom?" he asked.

"I'll try. Jump aboard!"

Harrison Simrall began throwing in the coal, and Tom took his place at the throttle.

A minute later they were bowling along at a fair rate of speed, with the other locomotive a good five minutes ahead of them.

"This is the fastest engine on the road," said Tom. "If we don't catch them before they get to Pine Valley I don't know what a throttle is for!"

As he finished speaking he glanced at his watch.

"Great God!" he cried, his face turning as pale as a sheet; "there is a train due in seven minutes, and it will meet the stolen engine long before the next siding is reached! There is bound to be a collision!"

CHAPTER XVII.

MASKED DAN IS CAPTURED.

Mile-a-Minute Tom turned deathly pale as he realized that the locomotive with Ethel North and the outlaws upon it was rushing to certain destruction.

There was only one thing that would avoid a collision, and that was the possibility of the regular train being fifteen minutes late!

Such a thing often happened, but was it at all likely that it would be late on this particular night?

No, it was more apt to be on time!

These were the thoughts that flitted through Tom's mind as his engine dashed along in mad pursuit of its stolen mate.

"We will keep on," said he, after a moment's thought. "If the train is late we might be able to overtake them in time to warn them of their danger."

"Heavens!" groaned Col. North, "my poor Ethel is doomed."

"Don't give up yet!" cried Simrall. "Maybe they've got things fixed so they won't run into the train. Those outlaws ain't fools, you know."

"I doubt it," replied Tom. "It isn't likely they have thought of anything but getting away when they took the locomotive."

One, two, three, four—five minutes passed!

In two minutes more the train from Blue Mountain was due to pass a crossing a mile beyond.

A cold sweat broke out on the forehead of the young engineer.

If there was a collision, he knew not only those on the stolen engine, but a score or more of other people might be killed!

As yet they had not come in sight of the locomotive they were pursuing, but as the track ran in a serpentine course at that point, Tom was not surprised at this.

Another minute passed, and then he knew the locomotive could not be overtaken in time, unless the regular train was late!

Tom clutched the lever with one hand, while he held his watch in the other.

Slowly the second hand went around until it had measured out another minute.

At that instant the whistle of an engine blowing for a crossing rang out.

"The train is on time!" exclaimed the young engineer, shutting off steam. "In less than half a minute the crash will come!"

He had scarcely spoken the words when he saw a locomotive calmly resting on a siding not fifty feet distant!

The siding had been laid that day for the benefit of a construction train, and Tom had not been aware of it!

"Thank Heaven!" he cried, as he reversed his engine. "Colonel, your daughter is saved from a horrible death! Now, then, we have got to run back like lightning to keep out of the way of the regular! I see the outlaws have turned back the switch all right."

As the locomotive came to a standstill and then began to back slowly, the reflection of the headlight of the approaching train could be seen on the rails as it rounded a curve.

But Mile-a-Minute Tom knew there was no danger. In a very short space of time he was backing at full speed for Bankville.

He did not slacken speed even when the yard limits were reached, but ran to within fifty feet of the roundhouse.

Then he jumped off and adjusted the switch so the regular could pull into the depot in its usual manner.

"What are we going to do now?" asked the colonel, as they wended their way homeward after the locomotive had been put up.

"I don't think we can do anything to-night," replied Tom. "Masked Dan has probably reached his headquarters by this time."

"I will call on the sheriff to-morrow, and see if I can't get him to ask the governor for troops enough to wipe out this bandit and his gang, and get my daughter back in safety."

"Perhaps the mysterious person who rescued her before might be able to do the same thing again," suggested Simrall.

"He is quite capable of doing it," added Tom.

Tom and Harrison Simrall parted with the colonel at the door of Mrs. Mansfield's residence, leaving him in a very disconsolate mood.

It was the young engineer's day on the next day, and as they had been disturbed from their slumbers, the two young fellows sought their couches as soon as possible.

The next day Tom, Lou Dailey and Harrison Simrall boarded the locomotive, and when the conductor gave the signal they started on the trip to Blue Mountain.

As they neared Pine Valley the young engineer kept a sharp lookout, but nothing out of the ordinary occurred until they were about to leave the station at that place.

Then a small stone, with a piece of paper wrapped about it, was flung by some person unknown through the open window of the cab.

It landed almost directly at Tom's feet, and Lou Dailey promptly picked it up and handed it to him.

Tom waited until he had got the locomotive down to the usual pace, and then removed the paper from the stone.

Spreading the paper out, he read the following, written in lead pencil:

"Masked Dan has made a wager that he will capture you single-handed to-night on your return trip. Be on the lookout."

That was all there was to it. It was addressed to no one, and no name was signed to it.

"Here is a note of warning," said Tom, passing it to his companions. "We must be on the lookout. If Masked Dan tries to capture me he may be captured himself."

"Or else get a fine streak of daylight through his heart," added Simrall, tapping his rifle in a significant manner.

"If the information that note gives is correct, Masked Dan is certainly a daring villain. How he intends to accomplish his purpose I am at a loss to imagine," observed the young engineer after a pause.

"Just keep cool, and we'll wait and see," spoke up Simrall.

Tom brought the train to Blue Mountain on time, and then he and his bodyguard prepared to enjoy themselves until it was time to go back.

The Kentuckian's keen eyes were continually roving around in search of some man that looked as though he might be an outlaw. In fact, Simrall was spoiling for a fight with some member of Masked Dan's band.

But not the least chance did he get during their stay at the mining town, and when the time arrived for Tom's train to go back he was really mad.

"Now let the Scourge of Pine Valley attempt to capture you, Tom," said he, as the young engineer opened the throttle and set the train in motion.

"If he does you will do me a favor if you will not shoot him unless you are compelled to," returned Tom.

"You want to take him alive, then?"

"Yes."

"All right. Who do you suppose it was that sent you the note in such a curious manner?"

"I have reason to believe it was the same man that rescued Ethel North from the outlaws."

"By Jove! I wouldn't be surprised if it was!"

The young engineer really believed it was the detective who had thrown the note through the window of the cab, though he had not seen him in several days.

Everything passed along in the usual manner until the train pulled up at Pine Valley Station.

Then a rough-looking man in tattered garments suddenly appeared alongside the locomotive, and in a pleading voice asked for a ride to Bankville.

It instantly flashed upon the minds of all three of the occupants of the cab that this seeming tramp was Masked Dan in disguise.

Tom gave a warning glance at his companions before answering the man.

"It is against the rules to let anybody ride on the engine," said he. "Why don't you speak to the baggage master?"

"I always have better luck with engineers," replied the tramp. "Don't say no, young feller; my feet are so sore that I can't walk another step, and I want to get into Bankville."

"Jump on, then; but you must lay low, so the conductor won't see you."

As Tom spoke the tramp clambered into the cab in the fashion of a well-nigh exhausted man.

He sunk down in the coal bunker with a sigh of relief and began nursing his feet, at the same time murmuring his thanks in a trembling voice.

Simrall took up his position directly in front of him as Tom started the engine, and when they got under good headway he calmly drew his revolver, and, leveling it at the tramp's heart, exclaimed:

"How do you do, Masked Dan?"

The supposed tramp gave a start of surprise, and then made a move to reach his pocket.

But the instant he did so Lou Dailey sprang upon him, and, seizing his arms, pinioned them to his sides.

Engineer Tom quickly produced a rope, and together the three bound him hand and foot.

"I am not sure whether you are Masked Dan or not," said Tom, "but I am going to search you and see if I can find out."

He quickly went through the man's pockets, though he protested loudly against such a proceeding, and repeatedly declared that he was nothing but a poor, abused tramp.

When the boy got through with his investigation he had brought to light a gold watch and chain, a brace of loaded revolvers, a bottle of chloroform and a syringe!

"So you are Masked Dan, after all?" said he.

"I am," was the retort, "but I am not of the sort to beg for mercy!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A COMPACT.

Tom was so much pleased with the capture of the outlaw captain that he concluded to say nothing about it to those on the train until they reached Bankville.

He made sure that the villain was securely tied, and then attended strictly to his duties on the engine.

Simrall kept a good watch over their prisoner, occasionally chaffing him over the manner of his capture.

Masked Dan remained silent for fully twenty minutes, and then, as though the thought had just struck him, he said:

"How did you people know it was me so soon?"

"Don't you suppose we had sense enough to imagine a trick was being played on us?" replied Simrall. "You ought to have known better than to try anything like that."

This evidently satisfied him, for he remained silent during the rest of the journey.

Great was the surprise of the railroad officials when they learned that the notorious Masked Dan had been captured, and great was the praise that Engineer Tom and his two companions received.

When the prisoner had been safely lodged in the Bankville jail, Tom and Simrall went home, well satisfied with their night's work.

The next morning Col. North paid a visit to the prisoner.

He wanted to learn tidings of his daughter, and see if he could not secure her release.

When he broached the subject to Masked Dan, the villain talked readily enough with him.

"Your daughter is safe and secure in a place where a regiment of soldiers could not effect her rescue," said he.

"Is there no way for me to get her back home again? How much money would it cost?" asked the colonel.

"What good would money do me now? I will be hanged or shot, I suppose."

"That is so," mused the colonel. "I forgot about that."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," and the outlaw lowered his voice to a whisper. "I'll fix it so you can get her if you will guarantee that I will get out of this jail a free man inside of twenty-four hours."

"How can I do that? I am not your keeper. You are in the custody of the town officers."

"Could you not fix it so I could escape?"

Col. North scratched his head in a meditative manner.

At length he said:

"I might fix it, providing my daughter was safe in my house before I did so."

"Well, you say you might do it—will you do it?"

"Y-e-s, upon the condition that Ethel is released first."

"And you will never divulge the transaction or how it was accomplished?"

"No, I will not! I will promise anything, so long as I can get my daughter back again."

"You say you will promise anything—will you keep your promise?"

"Sir"—and Col. North spoke with just the least bit of dignity—"sir, I am a business man, and also a man of my word."

"All right; I will take the chances. Now, then, furnish me with a piece of paper and a pencil for a moment, and I will fix it so you will have your daughter back inside of twelve hours."

"And when she is back?"

"Then you must get me out of here. Must, I say, for I don't fancy having my neck stretched, I can tell you!"

"Here is the paper and pencil; proceed! I will stick to my part of the agreement if I lose my reputation for it."

"Now you are talking like a man," observed the outlaw captain, as he took the articles handed him.

Though a vile outlaw, Masked Dan was an educated man, and it did not take him long to write the following note:

"BROTHERS: The Scourge of Pine Valley is caked at last. He must get out, and he will if the bearer of this

brings Ethel North, the girl prisoner, to her father in Bankville. Don't waste any time, for delays are dangerous.

Your captain,

"MASKED DAN."

As he handed this note to the colonel the outlaw captain said:

"Take this to Crowley's saloon on Front Street and hand it to the man behind the bar. Do not say anything, but listen to what he says."

"I'll do it," replied the colonel; "and I give you my word that I will never mention anything about this business to a living soul."

"All right. Now, before you go, tell me how you are going to fix it so I can escape?"

"Leave that to me; I'll fix it."

"Very well, then. Good-morning, colonel!"

"Good-morning," responded the colonel, and then he passed out of the cell as the jailer unlocked the door for him.

"It is not the right thing for me to do, but I must do it to save Ethel," muttered the colonel, as he turned his footsteps in the direction of the saloon the outlaw had instructed him to go to.

He kept muttering to himself as he hurried along, and failed to notice that somebody was following him very closely and straining his ears to catch his mutterings.

The colonel did not notice this even when he entered the saloon, with the man right at his heels.

And this man was no other than the detective.

The saloon was a filthy-looking, low place, and the colonel seemed to be a trifle out of his element when he entered.

However, he walked up to the bar, and, without a word, handed the bartender Masked Dan's note.

The man read it over carefully, and then, looking the colonel squarely in the eyes, said:

"That signature is all right, so it must be all right. You can meet your daughter at Pine Valley Station at eight o'clock to-night. That will give you time to catch a train back."

Without a word the colonel nodded, and then passed out of the place.

"Here, Jaggs," exclaimed the bartender, addressing our friend, the detective, "I suppose you had better take this note to headquarters at once." Then, in a whisper, he added:

"The captain is going to exchange the girl for himself. That Col. North is a cute old chap, too."

"It is a very good scheme," replied the detective, "for I don't believe we could do anything toward getting the captain out of that jail; it is too well guarded."

"That's just my opinion. But this colonel can fix it easy enough, because they won't suspect him."

"You are right. Well, give me the note, and I'll be off. I don't suppose there is much use staying round here any longer, anyhow."

The Shadow took the note and left the saloon, turning his footsteps in the direction of the depot.

He was still disguised as a cattleman, and so good was his make-up that no one suspected him of being either an outlaw or a detective.

It happened that a train was just about leaving, so, purchasing a ticket, he boarded it and started for Pine Valley.

As it was quite risky to enter the retreat during daylight, the detective was forced to wait a long time before a favorable opportunity came.

It was well past noon when he succeeded in getting in, and as soon as he did so he passed the note around for all hands to read.

The men gave a faint cheer when they heard their captain was going to make good his escape.

They had heard of his capture the first thing that morning, and since then they had been a trifle despondent.

"You can take the girl and get out as soon as it gets dark," said the outlaw in charge. "It must be all right, for the captain says it is in the note."

"There is no doubt but it is all right," returned the detective.

Time passed slowly to the daring man, who was going to free Ethel North.

As the day dragged along and darkness finally came, Ethel was notified to get ready to return to her father.

She could scarcely believe her senses when she heard this, but she lost no time in obeying.

A few minutes later she was ready.

She was blindfolded, and then, after making sure that the coast was clear, the outlaws allowed the supposed Dick Jaggs to conduct her outside.

This was the second time he had done this, but under different circumstances.

When they had walked a hundred yards from the hidden entrance, the detective removed the handkerchief from the girl's eyes.

"Now, Miss North," said he, "you will soon be with your father, who is waiting for you at the station."

CHAPTER XIX.

A SCARED LAWYER.

"Masked Dan has escaped!"

This was the startling announcement made by the jailer as he rushed into the Bankville police headquarters three hours before sunset.

"How?" was the cry from the officials.

How could he get out of the cell in the jail, which they considered as strong as any jail in the country?

"I don't know exactly how he got out," resumed the jailer, "but he did get out, for he ain't there now."

The news quickly spread through the thriving little town that the Scourge of Pine Valley was at large, and the people became very much excited.

When Mile-a-Minute Tom and Harrison Simrall heard the news they were thunderstruck.

"They must be a set of fools in charge of the jail," said Tom, in a tone of disgust.

"I'll fix him the minute I clap my eyes on him," returned the Kentuckian.

Tom was not a little worried over Masked Dan's escape. He felt now that the villain would not rest until he had slain him, and it behooved the young engineer to be more careful than ever.

As it was Tom's day off, he suggested to Simrall that they make a trip to Pine Valley.

"I'll agree to that," returned the Kentuckian, "provided we disguise ourselves."

"That would be an excellent plan," said the boy. "We will do it."

After Mile-a-Minute Tom and Harrison Simrall had disguised themselves as drummers for an Eastern firm they went out to Pine Valley and spent the time going around among the newly-opened saloons with the hope that they would be able to pick up some clues about the bandits.

Mile-a-Minute Tom wore a blond wig and false mustache and eyeglasses, and his companion put on a pointed beard and a wig of a dark-brown color. They met several trainmen that they knew, but they were not recognized by any of them.

After spending the afternoon in a vain attempt to learn something about the bandits, the Kentuckian suggested to Tom that they stroll down the railroad track toward Bankville, as there was a possibility that they might get a long range shot at some of the train wreckers. Tom assented, and they started down the track in the direction of the town. They had not gone very far before they saw the dark figure of a man moving along rapidly in front of them. Tom thought at first that it might be Bullock, the detective.

As the suspicions of Simrall and the young engineer had been aroused, they immediately decided to make a detour and overtake the man, one from the right side of the track and one from the left side.

They separated, and Tom made a wide detour on the right side and Simrall on the left side of the track. They succeeded in reaching a point some distance in front of the track walker, evidently without attracting the man's attention. When he came abreast of them they both jumped suddenly in front of him, at the same time leveling their guns at his heart and commanded him to throw up his hands.

The stranger obeyed them as though he had been ordered to throw up his hands by the Angel Gabriel. He appeared frightened to death and could hardly speak. Simrall asked the man his name; he attempted to speak several times, and finally said Foe-Foe-Foe, and then stopped.

"What does he say?" exclaimed Tom.

"He calls us foes," said the Kentuckian. "Do you suppose that he has malted milk in his top-piece instead of brains?"

"That's hard to say," replied Tom.

Just at this point the man seemed suddenly to regain his nerve and said:

"What is your business with me? What do you mean by holding me up in this way?"

"We want to know who you are, and what your business is, and where you are going," replied Simrall.

"My name is Foeman—Don Foeman," replied the man, in a steady voice, "and my business is that of a lawyer. I walked out this way to-night for the purpose of seeing the location of a mining claim that I am interested in."

"So that's it, is it?" exclaimed Simrall. "We didn't know whether you were one of those bad men that hang out around here or not."

"What have you to prove that you are what you say you

are?" said Tom. "If your name is really Don Foeman, and you are a lawyer, you must have something to prove it."

"I have evidence!" exclaimed the man, and he put his hand in his pocket and drew out a large bundle of legal-looking papers and letters, and handed them to Simrall.

"You keep him covered," said the Kentuckian, "so he won't fade away while I read this evidence."

Taking out a match, he lighted it and looked at one of the letters. It was addressed to Mr. Don Foeman, care the Phoenix Hotel, Bankville.

Simrall pulled the letter out and opened it. It was written in a very girlish hand, and began: "Dearest Darling Don."

"Whew!" exclaimed Simrall, as he read it aloud to Tom. "He is a strong favorite with the ladies. We won't interfere with this gentleman any further."

As he said this, he and Tom both put up their guns, and Simrall returned the papers and letters to their owner, at the same time assuring him that they had not meant to hurt his feelings in the least—that as they were on the lookout for some of the bad men that were in that locality they did not want to take any chances with anybody.

After Tom and Simrall had told the young lawyer who they were, he assured them that he felt no hard feelings towards them, and that he hoped that they would be able to run their trains through Pine Valley in perfect safety in the future. Both Tom and Simrall thanked him and he then bid them good-by, saying that as he was going back to Bankville on the next train he would now go to Pine Valley Station and wait for the train, which would soon be due there.

After leaving the young lawyer, the two friends walked on down the track to the place where the bandits had wrecked the train that had Col. North and his party of deputy sheriffs on board.

A short time afterwards they reached the station and found that they had only a few minutes to spare before the train to Bankville would arrive. There were a dozen or more rough-looking men who were evidently going to Bankville on the same train.

Tom and the young Kentuckian thought nothing of the presence of these men at that time, but they had good cause to remember them less than thirty minutes later.

CHAPTER XX.

MASKED DAN'S ESCAPE.

As soon as Col. North left him, Masked Dan began to think over the compact he had made with him.

"It was the only thing I could do," he muttered. "The chances are that unless I get away my trial will come off in a day or two, and then it will only be a question of a few hours before I am executed. It is rather tough on me that I should be compelled to give the girl up; but it is the only thing I can do, unless I can get out before dark to-night, without the colonel's assistance."

The morning wore on until noon arrived.

When the man came with the prisoner's noonday meal he told him to hurry up and eat.

"What shall I hurry for?" coolly asked Masked Dan.

"Because it is my afternoon off, and I want to get home," was the reply.

"Are you going right out of the jail as soon as I get done eating?" questioned the outlaw captain.

"I am; just as soon as I leave the tray in the kitchen."

"I wish I was going out with you."

"I suppose you do," and the jailer grinned. "But I am afraid when you do go out of this cell you'll only go a few yards, and then a rope necktie will be put around your neck."

While the man was speaking a desperate resolve came in Masked Dan's head.

If he could overpower the man was it not possible that he could don his clothing, and go on out as though he were the jailer?

It was a plan worth trying, and if he failed the colonel was bound to get him out, anyhow.

"See here," said he, suddenly, "how is it that you were so kind as to put milk in my coffee to-day?"

"I didn't know as there was any milk in it; must be a mistake," replied the jailer, as he leaned over to take a look at the coffee.

The next moment a startling thing occurred.

As quick as a flash Masked Dan threw the contents of the cup in the man's face, while at the same moment he slipped the revolver from the pocket of his coat.

"If you make an outcry I'll shoot you dead!" he hissed. "I've got your own revolver leveled at your heart?"

The jailer was half blinded by the coffee, but he could hear as well as ever, and he deemed it advisable to remain perfectly quiet.

"I am a desperate man," went on the outlaw captain, "and I am going to get out of here! Anybody who attempts to oppose me I will shoot dead with your revolver. Take off your coat and hat, my man, and be a little quick about it."

Without a word the jailer obeyed, and Masked Dan hurriedly put them on.

The coat was of corduroy, and quite conspicuous, and that was why the outlaw hoped to get outside the prison walls.

Every one of the prison officials knew the jailer wore that coat, and if they should see a man going out with it on, they would naturally think it was the jailer.

"Hand over your keys!" exclaimed the villain. "I am going to lock you in the cell in my place. If you make the least bit of noise before I get out of the jail I will kill the first man I meet. That won't harm you any, but still you will be responsible for it."

Without waiting for a reply he slammed the door shut, and, after locking it, strolled leisurely down the corridor, carrying the tray in one hand and the bunch of keys in the other.

Masked Dan knew the way out well enough, but he was daring enough to go to the kitchen first and set the tray on a table.

Then he turned and deliberately walked out by the front way.

Just as he was a dozen feet from the door a man hailed him.

"Hey, Jackson!" he yelled, "you are taking the keys home with you!"

The outlaw captain tossed the bunch of keys to the man, and then, without turning, hurried on.

Once out of sight of the jail, he made a bee line for the saloon he had sent Col. North to.

He reached it by the time the alarm was given out, and, a few minutes later, in a neat disguise, he walked back to the jail and joined the throng of people who had gathered about it.

No one dreamed of his being the escaped prisoner, so after he had remained there for a few minutes he made his way to the depot and took a train for Pine Valley.

Arriving here, the bold villain made for one of the hotel shanties that was not run in the interest of his band, and prepared to wait until dusk, so he might gain admission to his retreat without being observed.

He knew that whoever came after the girl would not leave his stronghold until after darkness set in, and he desired to be there in time to prevent it.

As soon as it began to get dark, Masked Dan made a bee line for his retreat as fast as his legs could carry him. As he was passing the station he was greatly chagrined to see Ethel North and her father standing on the station platform surrounded by men who were congratulating Col. North on his daughter's escape.

"I am too late," muttered the bandit, and he hurried on to his retreat.

As Masked Dan entered a cheer went up from his men, and everyone wanted the privilege of shaking his hand at the same time.

"I am not dead yet, boys," said the villain, smiling beneath his mask—for he had put it on before he entered the cave.

"No, and you ain't likely to be for a good many years!" cried one of his men.

"What is the news?" asked the captain, after a pause. "Does anybody know whether that big shipment of gold dust was made to-day?"

"It is to come through to-night!" exclaimed a dozen voices in unison.

"On what train?"

"The one that gets here in the neighborhood of eleven o'clock."

"Good! We have let up on the railroad for a long time, but to-night we must have that gold dust."

"How are we going to hold up the train—wreck it?"

"Yes; we will wreck the whole business. The two cans of nitro-glycerine we have had on hand such a long time will do the business. They must be placed on the track at the curve half a mile below here just before the train comes along."

"Will they explode without being touched off with a match?" asked one of the outlaws, who was ignorant of the powers of the explosive.

"The instant the engine strikes either of the cans she will be blown into the air, and I guess the cars will stop soon enough after that."

"Surely," spoke up the detective; and then he gave an inward shudder.

"We will have to do our work quick after the explosion," went on Masked Dan, "for in fifteen minutes' time the miners and drovers will be upon us. Every man must keep an eye upon the express car, and make for it the moment it comes to a standstill."

Dick, the Shadow, was ordered by Masked Dan to place the two cans of nitro-glycerine on the track, and when the time came for him to do it, he set out in advance of the outlaws, who were going to rob the train.

He placed them on the track as he heard the train ap-

proaching, and then immediately picked them up again, and, placing them near the track, covered them with sand!

As luck would have it, he found a workman's dinner can near by, and this he put on the track, just as the glare of the headlight of the approaching locomotive fell upon him.

The engineer thought something was wrong, and he quickly whistled down brakes, and reversed his engine.

Masked Dan and his men, from their place of concealment behind a pile of rocks, saw the engine strike the can, and they were much astonished when no explosion followed.

"The stuff must be spoiled!" cried the outlaw captain in a rage. "Shoot the engineer and fireman, boys, so they can't start the locomotive. We must have the contents of that express car!"

The reports of half a dozen rifles rang out immediately after the villain spoke, and the two men in the cab of the engine were ruthlessly slain.

The train soon came to a stop, and then the outlaws made a rush upon the express car, discharging their weapons at all who opposed them.

Minute Tom and Simrall were busy shooting into the ranks of the outlaws, when the conductor of the train shouted:

"Is there an engineer among us?"

"There is!" exclaimed Tom; "I am an engineer."

"Jump on the engine, then, and get us away from here. It is our only chance to save the treasure in the express car."

"Come, Harrison!" exclaimed the young engineer; "that is an excellent idea of the conductor's; we may be able to best them yet."

The express car was next to the locomotive, but the two sprang off and started in a semicircle through the darkness, hoping to reach the cab of the locomotive unobserved by the outlaws.

In this they were successful. The villainous band seemed to be too busy in their work of battering in the doors of the car to notice them.

In exactly two minutes from the time they jumped off the car Tom and Simrall were on the engine.

In another moment the young engineer had seized the throttle.

Puff-puff! puff, puff, puff! The locomotive started ahead as fast as it could, and then both Tom and Simrall were forced to lie low to escape the storm of bullets that came that way.

The outlaws were foiled, for they had not succeeded in breaking open the doors of the express car when Tom put the train in motion.

"Oh, if I only had my rifle with me," sighed Simrall; "I could pick off half a dozen of those fellows, sure enough."

"Never mind," replied Tom; "we fooled them nicely that time, and saved considerable for the company."

He reached up as he spoke and threw back the lever.

A few moments later the train was rushing along at a mile a minute, leaving the disappointed outlaws, cursing and swearing at their luck, far behind.

The train arrived at Bankville nearly an hour late, but the railroad officials did not find fault with this when they learned what had caused the delay.

After the battered express car containing the gold dust

had been run into the yards and left in charge of the armed express guards, Tom and the Kentuckian felt so jubilant over their success in saving the treasure that when Harrison Simrall said that he thought that they ought to make a Roman holiday out of the morrow, the young engineer enthusiastically agreed with him, and said that he would go and see Mr. Maury Kemper, the superintendent, and ask him for a holiday.

Tom little dreamed at that moment how near he was to taking an eternal holiday. "By the by," he exclaimed, "we haven't taken off our disguises yet."

"That's so," assented Simrall.

"Well, I guess I will take mine off now. I don't look much like Mile-a-Minute Tom in this outfit."

The young engineer was driving his engine through the deserted yards to the distant roundhouse at that moment, and had no thought of any danger, when they heard a voice say: "So you are Mile-a-Minute Tom, are you?"

The words were fairly hissed in his ear.

Almost thunderstruck, our two friends turned around.

Within three feet of them stood a man with a huge revolver in each hand, the muzzles of which covered the hearts of the brave young engineer and his companion.

It was Masked Dan!

"Gentlemen," coolly remarked the outlaw captain, "you have just ten seconds to live."

As Masked Dan uttered the words, Tom felt an icy chill run down his spine. But he did not lose his nerve entirely.

It instantly flashed through his mind that if he had to die he would do so while making an effort to save his life.

So quickly did he reach this conclusion that the outlaw's words had scarcely died out when he dropped upon his hands and knees, and darted between the bandit's legs, upsetting him!

As the bandit fell, Harrison Simrall sprang upon the man and pinioned his arms.

"Now, then, Mr. Man, I guess that it's you who have just ten seconds to live!"

"Hold!" cried a voice from the rear of the tender; "don't shoot that man."

"Detective Bullock!" shouted the young engineer, as the detective emerged from the shadows at the back of the tender.

"Yes, it is I," said the Shadow, as he took from his pocket a pair of handcuffs, and, with the assistance of Simrall, who was holding on to the bandit for dear life, fastened them on the man's wrists.

"I will take charge of this fellow," murmured the detective.

"Certainly," replied Tom. "Take charge of him at once," and the young fellow turned his attention to his locomotive.

"I don't know about this," observed Simrall; "he has been in the Bankville jail, and got out rather easy."

"I will see that he does not get out this time," returned the Shadow.

"All right, then; I'll give in, but I did say that I was going to let daylight through his heart the first time I got the chance."

Meanwhile Masked Dan had not uttered a word since the tables had been turned upon him in such a neat and unexpected manner.

How the bandit and the detective came to be on the engine is easily explained.

The Shadow happened to be near Masked Dan when Mile-a-Minute Tom volunteered to run the locomotive, and before he could think of doing anything to assist them he saw the outlaw captain make a bolt for the engine.

The detective recognized Tom's voice, and it quickly occurred to him that Masked Dan meant to kill the boy.

"He is going to play a trick, so I will follow his example," he muttered; and then, while the outlaws were pounding upon the doors of the express car in their efforts to get inside, he crept along in the wake of their captain.

He saw him clamber over the back of the tender and secrete himself behind a pile of coal.

Then, with surprising quickness, the detective drew himself upon the little box which was attached to the rear of the tender for the purpose of carrying extra couplings, etc., and coolly sat down.

The next instant he saw Engineer Tom and Harrison Simrall dash by and board the locomotive.

The instant the train was in motion he raised his head and peered into the cab in a cautious manner.

He kept his eye upon Masked Dan, and when the villain did the act already recorded, he did it so quickly that he even surprised the Shadow.

As he beheld the peril of our two friends the detective's face turned deathly pale; but gritting hard upon his teeth, as though he was going to do something that was against his feelings, he leveled his revolver at the back of the outlaw captain.

It was quite plain that he meant to slay him in order to save the lives of Mile-a-Minute Tom and the Kentuckian.

But before he could pull the trigger the young engineer made the sudden move that upset Masked Dan, and with a sigh of relief the Shadow placed the revolver back in his belt.

Then it was that he asked the Kentuckian not to kill the outlaw captain.

Though it was late in the night, quite a crowd collected when it became noised about that Masked Dan was again in the clutches of the law.

A couple of officers soon arrived at the roundhouse, and they assisted the detective to escort the prisoner to the jail.

"I reckon you won't fool me again," said the man the outlaw had so neatly tricked when he made his escape. "If you get out this time I am willing to resign my position and beg for a living."

"I have fooled better and sharper men than you," returned Masked Dan, quietly.

It was quite plain that he could not understand whether the supposed Dick Jaggs was for or against him.

He had too much faith in the detective to doubt him, and yet he could not understand why it was that he had delivered him into custody, instead of shooting Engineer Tom and his companion when they had the best of him on the locomotive.

"If he is doing all this to gain some point, he is overdoing it by placing my life in too much danger," muttered the outlaw captain.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LAST OF MASKED DAN.

It was late the next morning when Tom arose.

As he had several days off, he had no occasion to leave his bed early, so he put in a good sleep, and felt all the better for it when he left his home in the company of Simrall about ten in the morning.

Naturally, they turned their steps in the direction of the jail to learn if everything was all right there.

On the way they met Col. North and his daughter, who had just driven down to the jail for the same purpose, and were on their way home.

They learned from them that everything was all right at the jail, and that there was no possibility of Masked Dan escaping.

"The Scourge of Pine Valley is to be executed at noon," said the colonel.

Ethel insisted upon shaking hands with Tom, and made him promise to call and see her.

"I don't think much of her father, but the girl is a dandy," observed the Kentuckian, as the couple drove on.

"Ethel North is certainly a fine girl," was Tom's retort.

"And she is just as sweet on you as she can be without telling you so."

The young engineer blushed a deep crimson.

"What do you mean," he asked.

"Just what I say. Can't you see it?"

"I never thought of such a thing. Why should I? She is the daughter of a wealthy man, who is one of the heaviest stockholders on the road, and I am only a poor, young engine driver, who has to work for a living. Pshaw! don't let such a foolish idea get into your head. Miss North only regards me as a friend."

"Never mind, we will wait and see. If you both live

long enough, you will marry that girl some day, Tom. See if you don't."

"Humbug! Talk about something else."

"I'll stake my right arm on it. I am a good judge of human nature, and I know what I am talking about."

As Tom and the Kentuckian reached the jail, they were just in time to see Bullock, the Shadow, coming out.

They hailed him, but he evidently did not hear them, for he paid no attention to them, but walked swiftly in the direction of the depot.

Our two friends did not go inside, but they learned from the jailer that everything was all right, and that the execution of Masked Dan would take place promptly at twelve.

"That detective was in to see him just now, but what passed between them I can't say. Anyhow, the bold outlaw chief has appeared very down-hearted ever since he went out."

"I don't think Masked Dan is made of the sort of stuff to give in at the last minute. He will die without weakening," said Tom.

"No, he won't," returned the jailer. "He acts now as though ready to squeal. He'll never die game, see if he does."

"I don't think I'll stay to witness the execution. I have no fancy for such sights," observed the young engineer, as he turned from the spot.

"I think we had better take a run down to Pine Valley, then," spoke up Harrison Simrall. "We might find something to interest us there."

"Very well, then. There is a train that leaves in twenty minutes. That must be the one the detective is going on."

The pair made for the depot, and reached it just in time to catch the train.

They searched through the cars in the hope of finding the Shadow, but if he was aboard he must have disguised himself, for they could not discover him.

"He is on the train, you can depend upon it," said Simrall. "Probably he is going to Pine Valley."

When the train stopped at Pine Valley Station our friends kept a sharp lookout as they got off.

About a dozen people got off, most of them being men on their way to the mines.

And still they failed to recognize the detective among them.

"He came on that train, just the same!" exclaimed Simrall, as the two walked off the platform.

"There is a possibility that he did not," said Tom.

"That is true; but I think he came all the same."

As Simrall spoke he turned his steps in the direction of the saloon.

The young engineer followed him, and the two went inside.

As they did so the man behind the bar cast an uneasy glance at them.

It was plain that he recognized Tom as the engineer the outlaws had had so much trouble with, and the fact of his paying his place a visit at such a time at this made him feel a trifle uncomfortable.

The Kentuckian was not slow to notice this, and, believing the fellow to be a member of Masked Dan's band, he proceeded to worry him.

"They tell me the outlaws have been cleaned out round here," said he, fixing his eyes on the man.

"Yes," was the reply; "and a good job it was, too."

"I don't think everybody agrees with you on that. Masked Dan has a good many friends."

"I don't know about that."

"Oh, yes; you used to be a friend to him yourself, didn't you?"

"Me? Oh, no!"

"Why, I thought I saw you making arrangements with him one night to work off a lot of counterfeit money."

This was not true, but it evidently hit the mark, for the man changed color, and involuntarily placed his hand on his revolver.

But he changed his mind instantly, and did not draw it.

"You act as though you are on the shoot," said Simrall, with a bland smile. "Don't spoil a good mind; go on and shoot."

"I am all right on the shoot if I want to," replied the saloon keeper, in a dogged tone.

"So am I," said the Kentuckian, rising to his feet. "I want you to understand that no such an ugly-looking coyote as you can back me down."

The next moment both men had drawn their revolvers!

Simrall had purposely picked the quarrel, because he believed the saloon keeper to be an outlaw.

Now he was satisfied that he was, but he meant to give him a fair chance for his life.

According to the laws and customs of the wild country they were in anybody would be justified in shooting on sight any man they knew to be an outlaw or horse thief.

But Simrall gave the fellow a chance.

"Where do you want to have it out—right in here?" he asked.

"Right in here will do, I guess," replied the man; and then, with a lightning-like movement, he jerked his revolver upward and pulled the trigger.

As the report rang out the Kentuckian staggered back against the wall, but before his back touched it his revolver cracked, and the saloon keeper tumbled to the floor with a bullet in his heart!

"Are you hurt, Simrall?" cried Tom, springing to the side of his friend.

"My shoulder is grazed—that's all. If he had shot a little lower he might have settled me," was the reply, in a cool tone of voice.

"There lies another of Masked Dan's men," said Tom, addressing the crowd that had gathered about the door. "He shot and missed, and then died himself."

The two now made their way in the direction of the underground retreat the outlaws had occupied.

Both felt like taking a look at it, and as soon as they started a number of miners asked if they might go along.

"Certainly," said Tom.

There were about a dozen in the party, and when they reached the place they found the entrance open. It was evident that the bandits had left that part of the world.

All hands descended the steps and entered the cave.

The miners, who had never seen the place before, gazed about them in wonder, and unanimously declared that Masked Dan must have had a long head on him to fit up such a snug hiding place.

While the men were engaged in examining their surroundings, Tom made his way to the rear end of the retreat.

He wanted to see the apartment Ethel North had been confined in.

As he opened a door and entered a passage, a man sprang upon him with the agility of a mountain lion and seized him by the throat.

It was Masked Dan!

Mile-a-Minute Tom could scarcely believe his senses. He had left the scourge of Pine Valley in jail in Bankville, awaiting to be executed at noon, and now he was here in his old haunt!

"You need not be surprised, Tom Mansfield!" hissed the outlaw chief. "I fooled my jailers again, and I came here for the express purpose of killing you, though I promised to let you alone. You have got to die!"

As the man spoke he raised a murderous-looking knife and prepared to drive it into the young engineer's heart.

At the very instant the knife was about to descend the sharp report of a rifle rang out, and Masked Dan dropped to the ground—a corpse!

The Kentuckian had arrived upon the scene at an opportune moment, and his unerring aim had done what the authorities at Bankville had failed to do—put an end to the career of the Scourge of Pine Valley.

Mile-a-Minute Tom was rendered speechless for several seconds. What had happened in the past few moments was so unexpected that it almost took his breath away.

But he recovered himself when he heard Simrall say:

"This fellow is Masked Dan, Tom, and he is as dead as a doornail!"

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

The miners picked up the body of the noted outlaw chief and carried it to the station, where it was placed aboard the first train that came along, and taken to Bankville.

Mile-a-Minute Tom and Simrall were much mystified as to how Masked Dan could have escaped, and as soon as they arrived at Bankville they made for the jail.

They questioned the first person they knew concerning the villain's escape, and were astonished to hear that Masked Dan had not escaped, but was to be hanged at four o'clock.

"There was something the matter with the gallows," said their informant, "so they put it off until four. You will be just in time to see it."

"There must be two Masked Dans!" exclaimed Tom. "Come on, let's see what sort of a mystery this is."

Much puzzled, the two hastened to the jail.

It was five minutes to four when they got there, and it was difficult for them to push their way through the immense throng that had gathered to witness the execution.

They managed to reach a place near the grim-looking gallows just as the sheriff and his assistants led the prisoner from the jail.

The prisoner looked very much like the Scourge of Pine Valley, but both Tom and the Kentuckian saw that he was not.

As the party neared the scaffold, Simrall stepped in front of them, and, in a ringing voice, exclaimed:

"Hold on! That man is not Masked Dan! I shot Masked Dan over two hours ago, and his body lies at the depot!"

These words not only had a startling effect upon the crowd, but upon the prisoner as well.

An expression of pain, intermingled with relief, crossed his face, and he sank back into the arms of his captors.

Then he recovered himself and made a sign that he would like to speak.

"No, I am not Masked Dan, the Scourge of Pine Valley," said he, addressing the crowd. "I set the notorious outlaw free this morning and took his place in the cell. I am Joe Bullock, the detective, who hunted Masked Dan and his band of cutthroats to the earth!"

A deathly silence followed these words, and then a prolonged yell went up from the crowd.

Some of them were for having the hanging anyhow, but when a wagon arrived bearing the body of the real Masked Dan they became silent.

The district attorney walked up to the Shadow—for it was surely he—and, placing his hand on his shoulder, said:

"Mr. Bullock, can you tell me why you violated the law by releasing the prisoner, and then taking his place?"

"I can," was the calm retort. "The notorious Masked Dan was my older brother!"

Had a bomb exploded in their midst the crowd could not have been more astonished.

"I discovered by chance yesterday that he was my older brother, who ran away from home when he was a boy. When I found out the relationship I could not let my brother die on the gallows."

"Fellow citizens," said the sheriff, "there will be no execution here to-day, as Masked Dan is already dead."

Then, turning to the detective, he added:

"Mr. Bullock, I am compelled to arrest you, though I don't think any jury will convict you for what you have done."

Mile-a-Minute Tom turned from the spot like one in a dream.

He had received more surprises that day than on any day in his life.

The detective and the outlaw captain twin brothers! It did not seem possible, but still it was true.

Half an hour later the Shadow was out on bail, and as Tom shook hands with him he said:

"I honestly believe that if Simrall had not shot your brother you would have perished in his place."

"I meant to confess what I had done before I reached the gallows," was the reply. "But say nothing more about it at present; I am ashamed of myself, and—well, I loved my brother!"

* * * * *

Five years later.

Bankville is quite a different place from what it was at the opening of our story.

It has increased in population and wealth nearly tenfold, and has all the requirements of any city in the Southwest.

The Bankville and Blue Mountain Railroad now runs all the way to the Pacific coast, and Tom Mansfield—well, through his own efforts and those of his father-in-law, Col. North, the plucky young engineer is superintendent of the eastern division of the road.

The Kentuckian was right when he said Tom would wed the pretty Ethel North some day, and at the wedding he was Tom's best man.

Joe Bullock, whom we knew better as the Shadow, went East after his acquittal, and is still living, though he has never been to Bankville or Pine Valley since he hunted down the outlaw band.

Lou Dailey, who used to fire for Tom, is now one of the most trusted engineers on the road, and Harrison Simrall, the Kentuckian, is one of the traffic agents.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 73, will contain "Seared With Iron; or, The Band of Skeleton Bar," by Cornelius Shea. The scene of this interesting tale is laid in the wilds of Arizona. A boy goes out there to seek his fortune and he finds a whole lot of adventure that he was not looking for. There is a masked band of desperadoes at Skeleton Bar, as the place where he stays is called, and their doings make interesting reading. You will learn in reading this story about the boy who was branded with the letters "U. S." on his back and what came of it. Look out for next week's issue.

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